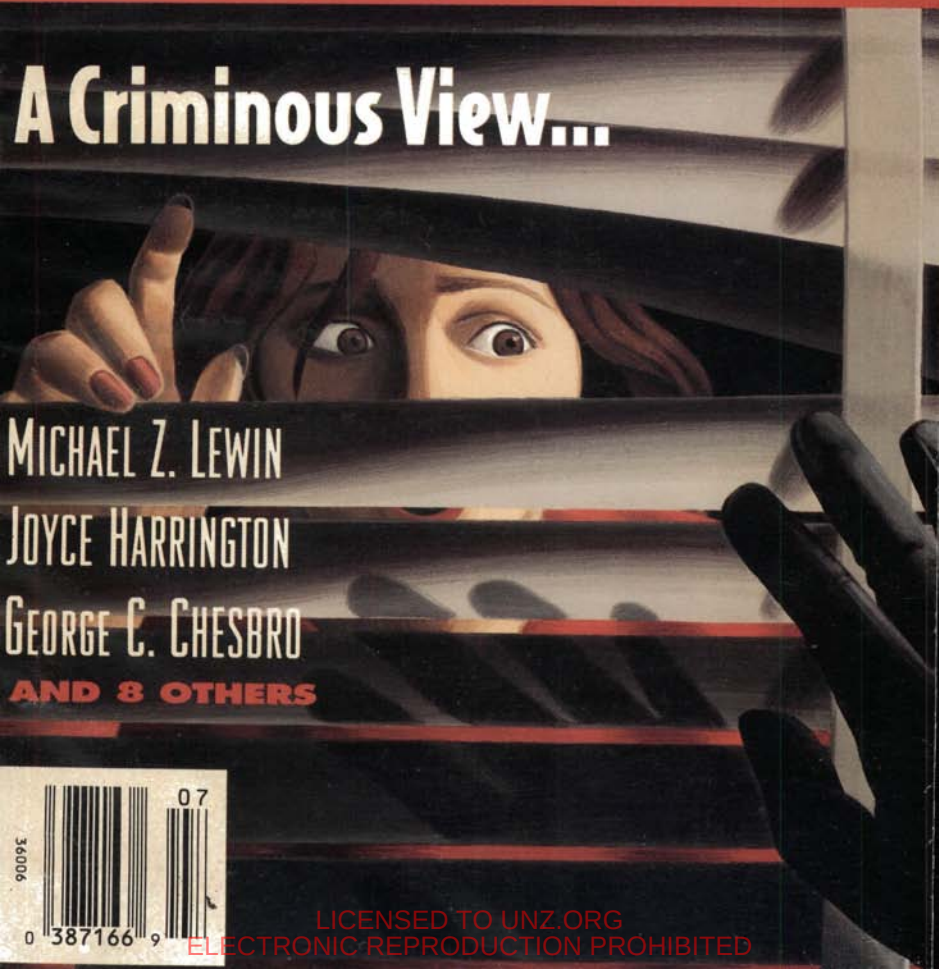
JULY 1993

$2.25 U.S. / $2.95 CAN.

ELLERY QUEEN®

THE WORLD'S LEADING

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



07

36006

0 387166 9

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Get away with MURDER

(6 books for 99¢ with membership)

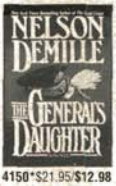
It's easy to make a killing with *Mystery Guild*®. First, slip the sharpest scissors out of the drawer. Then, ever so quietly, cut out the coupon below. Finish it off with a pen (caution: do *not* use invisible ink). Tonight, *you* can start slashing as much as *60% off* publishers' edition prices. Become a partner in crime with *Mystery Guild*!

4242 $19.95/**$9.98**

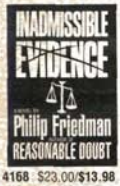
4226 $17.95/**$9.98**

4234 $18.95/**$9.98**

2469 $21.95/**$12.98**

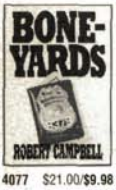


4150*$21.95/**$12.98**



4168 $23.00/**$13.98**

4184 $21.95/**$12.98**



4077 $21.00/**$9.98**

4069 $19.95/**$9.98**

4085 $20.00/**$9.98**

4101 $21.00/**$9.98**

3699 $23.00/**$10.98**

HERE'S WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU JOIN...

A GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION. Once your membership's accepted, we'll send the 6 BOOKS you've chosen plus your FREE CLUB TOTE. If you're not 100% satisfied with the books, return them within 10 days *at our expense*. Membership will be canceled and you'll owe nothing. The Club Tote is your free gift to keep.

HUGE DISCOUNTS ON HARDCOVER BOOKS. Save as much as 60% off publishers' edition prices. Club books are sometimes altered in size to fit special presses.

THE FREE CLUB MAGAZINE. You'll receive up to 16 issues a year. Each issue reviews the Featured Book Selections plus a wide variety of books from the Club's extensive library.

SHOPPING MADE SIMPLE. To get the Featured Book Selections, *do nothing*—they will be sent automatically. If you prefer another book—or none at all—simply return your Member Reply Form by the specified date. A shipping and handling charge (and sales tax, where applicable) is added to each order.

AN EASY-TO-MEET OBLIGATION. Take up to 2 years to buy 4 more books at regular low Club prices. Afterwards, you may resign membership anytime.

RISK-FREE RETURN PRIVILEGES. If you get an unwanted book because your Club magazine was delayed and you had less than 10 days to respond, simply return the book *at our expense*.

Prices in fine print are for publishers' editions.

Prices in bold print are for Club hardcover editions.

x Hardcover edition exclusively for Club members

* Explicit scenes and/or language

FREE TOTE
with membership

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

4127 $17.95/**$9.98**

4135 $20.00/**$9.98**

8722 $17.00/**$9.98**

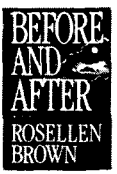
2907 $17.98/**$9.98**

5256 $18.50/**$8.98**

5249 $16.95/**$8.98**

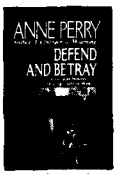
5231 $18.95/**$9.98**

4671 $18.95/**$8.98**



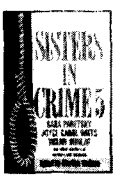
4176* $21.00/**$12.98**

2873 $21.00/**$9.98**

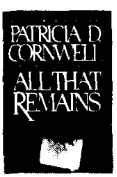


2451 $18.00/**$9.98**

2485 $19.00/**$9.98**



2501 **$9.98x**

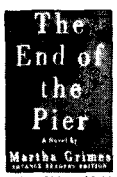


5058 $20.00/**$8.98**

5074 $18.95/**$9.98**

2519 $19.00/**$8.98**

5165 $19.50/**$9.98**



9332 $20.00/**$9.98**

6338 $17.95/**$8.98**

7427* $18.95/**$9.98**

4424 $22.00/**$12.98**

2477 $19.00/**$9.98**

2527 $19.95/**$9.98**

7237 $19.00/**$9.98**

MYSTERY GUILD

MAIL TO: *Mystery Guild*
6550 East 30th Street
P.O. Box 6362
Indianapolis, IN 46206-6362

Please write book numbers here:

YES! Please enroll me in *Mystery Guild* according to the risk-free membership plan described in this ad. Send me the 6 BOOKS I've indicated—plus my FREE CLUB TOTE. Bill me just 99¢, plus shipping and handling.

SAVE MORE—BUY YOUR FIRST BOOK NOW FOR $3.49
☐ Send me the book I've indicated and reduce my commitment to only 3 more books. Bill me an additional $3.49, plus shipping and handling.

(write book number)

38389 78

Mr./Mrs.
Miss/Ms. _____
(please print)
Address _____ Apt. _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

38390 79

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members serviced from Canada, where offer is slightly different. Sales tax added where applicable. We reserve the right to reject any application.

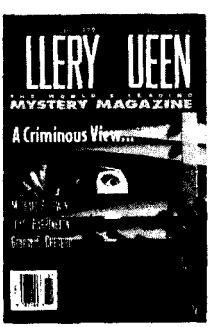
EQM 7/93

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contents

ELLERY QUEEN
THE WORLD'S LEADING
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Rainey Shines	Michael Z. Lewin	4
Cop Groupie	Joyce Harrington	24
Evil in the Air	William Bankier	34
Find a High Place	Suzanne Jones	47
Playland	Jackie Walsh	61
The Jury Box	Jon L. Breen	68
Who Killed Wee Winky?	Barbara Owens	71
The Theft of the Bald Man's Comb	Edward D. Hoch	82
Class Reunion	Martin Werner	101
Pigskill	Janice Law	107
Last Bus to Manchester	Donald Olson	115
Lone Wolf	George C. Chesbro	125

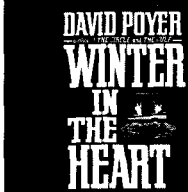


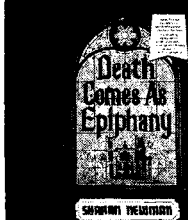
Cover Illustration by
Cathleen Toelke

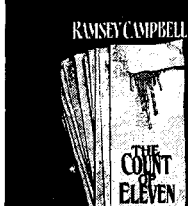
Dell Magazines, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036
Note: indicia on page 156

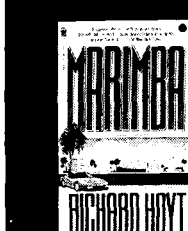
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TOR BOOKS









THE BEST MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE

WINTER IN THE HEART

DAVID POYER

"DAVID POYER'S [*WINTER IN THE HEART*] HAS THE RELENTLESS FORCE OF A CHOKE-HOLD. ONE OF THE YEAR'S TRULY OUTSTANDING NOVELS."—MYSTERY SCENE

0-312-85421-8 • $21.95 • JUNE HARDCOVER

DEATH COMES AS EPIPHANY

SHARAN NEWMAN

"ONE OF THE MOST CONVINCING FEMINIST HISTORICAL NOVELS...A FASCINATING RECREATION OF MEDIEVAL THOUGHT."—MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY

0-312-85419-6 • JUNE HARDCOVER

THE COUNT OF ELEVEN

RAMSEY CAMPBELL

"IF *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS* AND *AMERICAN PSYCHO* HOLD THE MODERN SERIAL KILLER UP FOR INSPECTION, *THE COUNT OF ELEVEN* TAKES US RIGHT INSIDE HIS HEAD. UNMISSABLE."—THE LONDON TIMES

0-812-52169-2 • $4.99/$5.99 • JUNE MASS MARKET

MARIMBA

RICHARD HOYT

"A SUPERIOR [THRILLER]...WITH AN AMORAL FAMILY THAT WILL CHILL THE BLOOD...DOUBLE-DEALING FEDERAL DRUG AGENTS AND NONSTOP ACTION..."—THE NEW YORK TIMES

0-812-55156-3-3 • $4.99/$5.99 • JUNE MASS MARKET

COMING IN MASS MARKET IN AUGUST—THE LATEST NOVEL FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF BALEFIRE—

PREY • KEN GODDARD

0-812-51198-0 • $5.99/$6.99

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

MICHAEL Z. LEWIN

Michael Z. Lewin is not only a fine novelist and short-story writer, last year he and author Liza Cody undertook the arduous task of compiling the British Crime Writers' Association's annual anthology of mystery fiction, 1st Culprit. *As an editor, Mr. Lewin has already shown himself to be a discoverer of new talent.* EQMM *will share one of his finds with you later this year; for the present, we turn to the man himself and one of the most delightful of all his short stories. . . .*

RAINEY SHINES

by MICHAEL Z. LEWIN

1.

Alex Rainey, arms occupied with two paper bags of groceries, shouldered his way through the front door of Homeleigh Guest House. Once inside, he eased the door closed again with the heel of a shoe and carried his burden through the foyer, past the office, and into the kitchen.

As he set the bags on the table, a voice, wafting like a fragrance, tickled his eardrums, or so he thought, and asked, "Hello? Is that you, Alex?"

" 'Tis I."

"I'm finishing up the accounts."

Happy for an excuse to leave his labours, Rainey retraced his steps as far as the guesthouse office.

"I wouldn't have thought there was that much to—" he began.

But he hit his head on the top of the door as he entered the room.

"Not again!" Pru said, without looking up.

"Goddamned England. Just because it's little and its cars are little and its people are little and its ambitions are little it thinks it can get away with its doors being little."

© *1993 by Michael Z. Lewin.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You always sound so much more American when you—"

"Smug, self-satisfied, undersized little island. Calls itself *Great* Britain? Well, I just think it's Cramped and Inconvenient Britain, and you can quote me all the way back to the seventh viscount. This country is just too damn small."

"Don't rub your pate so much, darling. It will get all shiny again. You know how you hate people using your forehead to see if their ties are straight."

"As well as being physically small, you people have dwarfism of the compassion."

"You've hit your head six times in the last five days. How often am I supposed to shed tears?"

"Remind me. Warn me. Help me." Rainey rubbed his head again. "Is it only five days?"

"Yes, yes. And only two days to go."

"Feels like forever," Rainey said. "Two and a half days. Half of today yet."

"As I recall, it was *you* who convinced *me* that we should look after this place for Wendy and Terry after they'd been let down."

"Well, she looked so sad."

"Sweet, kind, sympathetic man that you are."

"Mmmmm." Rainey picked up Pru's bag and began to hunt through it.

"Hey! What do you think you're doing?"

"Going through your bag," he said.

"I keep all my love letters in there!"

Rainey found what he was looking for and took the mirror out. He held it up and looked at the reflection of his bald head.

"Just a scuff," Pru said.

"A scuff! There's blood up there."

"If you want me to apply a tourniquet to your neck . . . "

"Heartless. Heartless."

"Do you think you could get the groceries in and check the bar stock before you expire. It would help so much."

"The groceries are in the kitchen and I'm sure the bar is all right for a mere three guests, unless they turn into alcoholics with the full moon around here."

"We have five guests, Alex."

"I thought there were three."

"We have a couple coming in tonight. Compatriots of yours."

"But I thought those Frenchies were leaving."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"They're staying another night."

"Nice to be told."

"I did tell you. Before you went shopping. I reminded you so that you would get enough food for breakfast."

"Mmmm."

"For someone who is supposed to be a genius, you can be the most exasperatingly stupid person!"

"I think a further short sortie into the depths of town is indicated. A bit of fresh air for my wound."

"Do you want me to pin a list to your shirt, or can you manage?"

"I think I'll cope." Then, "Do you think it will leave a scar?"

"If it doesn't," Prudence Rainey said, "then I think maybe I will."

2.

"Eight years," Alex Rainey moaned behind the bar. "Eight long years."

"You do not like living in England, then, Mr. Rainey?" asked Monsieur Hirou.

"Lord no. Terrible place. I don't know how human life manages to sustain itself."

"Is it just the food you are meaning?" Madame Hirou asked. "Or the weather, or are there other things more subtle?"

"There is a fog of the soul," Rainey said, and he lifted his eyes in melancholic posture.

After glancing at her husband, Madame Hirou said, "But it is beautiful too, especially here in the West Country."

Rainey shrugged.

"But say to me, Mr. Rainey," said Monsieur Hirou, "if you don't like it so much, why do you live here?"

"Ahhh," Rainey said, with another theatrical gesture. "My downfall. An uncontrollable passion for a beautiful woman who refuses to live anywhere else. *D'accord.* What can one do?"

Monsieur Hirou nodded understandingly. And, as if on cue, Pru entered the small bar from the foyer. The Hirous and Rainey all looked at her carefully as she entered.

"Is something wrong?" she asked.

"No, no," Rainey said. And sighed.

"Well, actually, there is," she said. "Mr. Bates, in number seven, is having some trouble with his plumbing."

"Ah, his plumbing," Madame Hirou said knowingly.

"Is surgery required?" Rainey asked.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, why don't you go up and make a diagnosis."

Pru did not remember to ask about Mr. Bates's plumbing until she and Alex had been in bed for an hour.

"Ah, a quick plunge saw it right," Rainey said. "I think I have an aptitude. The perfect wrist."

"Perhaps you should take it up professionally."

"I would have thought," Rainey said speculatively, "that there were a number of improvements which could be made in basic plumbing design."

From elsewhere in the house they heard a door slam.

"That must be the Maxwells," Pru said. "They said they would be coming in late, so I gave them a key."

"How long are they staying?"

"She wasn't sure. Maybe only tonight, but perhaps another day or two. Her husband had some business in Bristol so she checked in and then met him there. I gather they were going to the theatre tonight."

"The theatre . . . " Rainey said wistfully. "I can remember when *we* used to go to the theatre in the evening."

"All right. All right. Two more days, that's all. Just two more days."

Pru was washing the breakfast dishes when Rainey came into the kitchen and closed the door. In a serious voice he said, "Has anybody left yet?"

"Left?" she asked, without looking up.

"As in checked out. Departed."

"Only Mr. Bates."

"Well, don't let the others leave."

"Alex, what's wrong?"

"The police would smack our little fingers, naughty, naughty."

"Alex?"

"Because there is a dead woman in number twenty-three."

"Good heavens! Who?"

"Never seen her before in my life," Rainey said.

3.

"You're of American origin, I believe, Mr. Rainey."

"That's right, Inspector Mothersole."

"And how long have you been with us?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"My wife and I have lived in this country for the last eight years."

"And you are hoteliers by trade?"

"We are not." Alex Rainey drew himself to his full and considerɔle height as if the idea of a life in guesthouse proprietorship was ɛpugnant to him.

Pru said, "We are filling in for friends who have gone on holiday, ıspector. Wendy and Terry Peverall."

"Ah yes, the Peveralls. And where exactly have they gone to, Mrs. ainey?"

"They're spending the week skiing in Austria."

"I see. And if you are not in the hotel trade, how do you normally ıake your living?"

"Alex has an independent income."

"Does he now?" Mothersole looked at Rainey. "That must be very leasant for you both."

"He also acts as an electronics and computer consultant for a umber of companies in the area and he dabbles in other activities, ɔme of which have commercial applications."

"Dabbles does he? All sounds very comfortable, very comfortable ıdeed," Inspector Mothersole said. "Myself, I and the wife have quite a job to scrape by with three teenage children. But then, that's fe for you."

"If you wish me to look at your investment portfolio," Alex Rainey ıid stuffily, "then I might be able to suggest some changes to in-ɛease the income potential."

"I see," Inspector Mothersole said.

"Inspector?"

"Yes, Mrs. Rainey?"

"She is not *Mrs.* Rainey," Alex Rainey said. "She is Lady Prudence lizabeth Scott-Rainey. And I would hope that—"

"Oh shut up, Alex! Please excuse my husband's bad manners. He ın be a dreadful and imperceptive boor, and he thinks that being ıtelligent entitles him to special treatment."

"I assure you that I am quite used to dealing with flawed personalies, Lady Prudence," Inspector Mothersole said with positiveness.

Mothersole looked at Rainey, as if expecting him to speak. But ainey said nothing.

"Perhaps, Mr. Rainey, you would be so good as to tell me exactly ɔw you discovered the dead woman."

"I looked in the room and saw her in the bed."

"Why did you look in the room?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"While my wife washed the breakfast dishes, I went upstairs to conduct the morning routine: clean sheets and towels; soap, glasses, toilet paper, tea makings. The things that are generally changed or checked each day."

"You do this all yourselves?"

"The Peveralls have a woman who comes in during the busy season, but this is the quiet time of year for them," Pru said.

"Do you know the woman's name?"

"Mrs. Witcombe."

"Ah yes. Paula and Darren Randall's girl that married Andy Witcombe's oldest boy." Mothersole turned back to Rainey. "So, you looked in the room and saw the woman in bed."

"I knew that the room was meant to be unoccupied so I went farther into the room and—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Rainey. You leave unoccupied rooms unlocked?"

"That was the Peveralls' instruction."

"Go on."

"I went far enough into the room to see that the woman was dead. Then I went to the kitchen to tell Lady Prudence to prevent those guests remaining on the premises from leaving, and I called the police."

"You are able to tell by looking that someone is dead, Mr. Rainey?"

"I know asphyxiation when I see it, Inspector Mothersole."

"Firsthand experience?"

"My sister is a forensic pathologist in Hartford, Connecticut. In the course of our chitter chatter we speak about her work. I have also read one or two books, and I attend a fair few autopsies."

"As part of your dabbling?"

"As part of my dabbling."

"Where we live," Pru said, "Alex is friendly with the coroner. He is often invited to autopsies. They have a little game in which each sees if he can notice a detail that the other misses."

"And do you often win this little game, Mr. Rainey?"

"I hold my own, Inspector."

"You sound quite a perceptive and constructive fellow, Mr. Rainey," Inspector Mothersole said. "Perhaps as a mere small-town policeman I should enlist your assistance on this puzzling case."

"Perhaps you should," Rainey said.

"Of course you could save us all time by explaining now why you killed this woman."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For the first time in several minutes Rainey smiled and looked interested. "But that would be telling," he said.

Pru was less amused. "Certainly you don't seriously think . . . "

"He was the first one to the body, Lady Prudence. Maybe he knew which vacant room to look in. If he was upstairs refurbishing the used rooms, why look into one that wasn't booked?"

"Why indeed," Alex Rainey said.

"So, Mr. Rainey, if you were me, what would you do next?"

"When your medical representative had finished, I would go upstairs to have a look at the body."

"Well, just let me go ask Dan how he's getting on."

4.

Inspector Mothersole hesitated outside the door of Room 23. He turned to Pru and said, "It's not a very pretty sight, Lady Prudence."

"I'll be all right," Pru said.

Mothersole held the door open and the three of them went in.

"Is this how you found the body, Mr. Rainey?"

"No. The covers were tucked neatly up to her shoulders and she had a nightie on. The one now on the table, I presume." Rainey looked slowly around the room. "I don't notice any other changes."

"I see."

"May I look at the body, Inspector?"

"Please do," Mothersole said.

Rainey went to the foot of the bed. "I like to start at the feet and work up," he said.

"Likes to start at the feet, does he?" Mothersole asked Pru.

But Pru said nothing. They both watched as Rainey examined the dead woman slowly.

After a few minutes Rainey said, "May I turn her over, Inspector?"

"Please do."

Shortly afterwards he turned back to the watching pair.

"Examination complete," Rainey said with some lightness. "I've done what I can without a scalpel and saw."

"And have you decided that you knew the woman?"

"Good heavens, no. Never saw her alive."

"What a pity. I think it would help us a good deal to know who she was. Don't you?"

"I think," Rainey said slowly, "that it would."

On the room door there was a sharp knock. Inspector Mothersole called out, "Enter," and a tall, angular young constable came into the room.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What is it, Howell?"

"I got Mrs. Witcombe here, Inspector. You said to let you know when she came."

"Please show her in."

Inspector Mothersole turned back to Rainey and Pru. "It crossed my mind that Mrs. Witcombe was the best source close at hand to tell us whether the dead woman had been a guest here before. What do you think, Mr. Rainey?"

5.

Constable Howell led a slight woman in her mid-thirties into the bedroom. Inspector Mothersole took her hands for a moment and greeted her warmly. "Sorry to have to ask you to come in, Janet."

"That's all—" She stopped as she noticed the body. "Oh my!"

"As you see, we have a little problem."

"Oh, Tony. Such a nice-looking woman too. But shouldn't she—I was about to say, shouldn't she be covered up, but I was thinking that she would get cold."

"Bit past that now, Jan."

Mrs. Witcombe looked at the body again and took a deep breath. Turning back to Inspector Mothersole she asked, "And how's Christine?"

"Fine thanks."

"The boys?"

"Being boys. And how is your mum?"

"Much as ever, thanks."

Inspector Mothersole hesitated before he said, "What I wondered was if you had ever seen this woman before."

Mrs. Witcombe frowned. "As a guest, you mean?"

"Anywhere."

Mrs. Witcombe looked at the Raineys.

Mothersole said, "The Raineys are here while the Peveralls are on holiday. They've never seen the woman before."

"Dead in the hotel and they never saw her?" Mrs. Witcombe looked at the couple again. "That's a bit funny, isn't it?" She moved to take another look at the woman, but it was brief. "No, Tony. I've never seen her before. Certainly not from town, and I'd swear I never saw her as a guest here either."

"Okay, Janet. Thank you very much for coming in."

"That's all right," she said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To Howell, Mothersole said, "Take Mrs. Witcombe downstairs and get Ashwell to run her home. Then bring the American couple up."

"Yes sir. And Inspector?"

"Yes, Howell?"

"Dickie said to tell you that they called the accountant back from where he was working and they got him waiting downstairs with the Froggie couple and the Yanks."

"Good. We'll see him after the Americans."

As the door closed behind Constable Howell and Mrs. Witcombe, Mothersole turned to the Raineys. "Sounds a reasonable question, doesn't it?"

"What do you mean, Inspector?" Pru asked.

"I think," Rainey said, "that he is referring to Mrs. Witcombe's wonderment that a woman could enter an unused room and get herself murdered in a hotel without the people in charge even knowing she was on the premises. Would I be right, Inspector?"

"You weren't under instruction to leave the front door unlocked by any chance, were you?"

"No," Pru said. "We have been scrupulous and careful about locking up. We've never left the premises empty and unlocked."

"Can you hear people coming in and out of the hotel?"

"Generally yes."

"And what time did you go to bed last night?"

"A little after eleven."

"And did you hear anything?"

"Only Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell when they came in about quarter past twelve."

"You expected them to be that late?"

"Yes," Pru said. "The other guests had night keys too, but the Maxwells were the only ones who came in after we closed up."

"I see," Inspector Mothersole said. "And Mr. Rainey? Any comment on how this woman managed to get herself killed here without either of you knowing about it?"

Rainey, who was thinking about something else, took a moment to focus on the question he was being asked. "Comment? Only that I think you will find that the woman was murdered elsewhere and put into this bed."

"Oh yes? Why do you say that?"

"People who die stressfully generally at least partially evacuate bladder and bowel. There is no sign of that on the bed. For similar reasons I doubt she was wearing that nightie when she was killed."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You are suggesting that she was dead when she was brought into the hotel?"

"Or killed elsewhere on the premises and brought into this room."

"But why?"

A knock on the door was followed by Constable Howell entering with a robust man of about forty-five and a well-dressed woman in her late twenties.

6.

"These here are Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell, Inspector," Howell said.

"How do you do, Inspector?" Chester Maxwell said, as he came forward and extended a hand for shaking. "I'm Ches Maxwell and this is my little woman, Candy."

"Mr. Maxwell," Mothersole said, shaking the proffered hand limply. "Mrs. Maxwell."

"A terrible thing to happen. Terrible. What can Candy and me do for you?"

Mothersole said, "You look uneasy, Mrs. Maxwell."

"It's just . . . I've never seen a dead body before. I'll be all right."

"Be brave, honey. We got to do our best to help these folks."

"Okay, Ches."

Mothersole said, "I would like you both to take a good look at the dead woman and tell me whether you think that you've ever seen her before."

"Not like that or I sure would have remembered," Maxwell said lightly, referring to the corpse's nakedness. Then he seemed to feel that a light tone was not appropriate and said, "Sorry."

The couple spent a short time looking at the body and turned back to Mothersole.

Maxwell shrugged. "Sorry. Never saw her before."

"Mrs. Maxwell?"

"I don't know her. I don't remember ever having seen her."

"You are both certain?"

They looked at each other and both nodded. "Sure as shooting," Chester Maxwell said.

"Where was your room last night?"

"Down the other end of this hall, at the front," Maxwell said.

"And did you hear anything in the least unusual, or anything at all after eleven-thirty?"

"We only got in from Bristol a little past midnight, but I didn't hear a thing. Did you, Candy?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Nothing, except your snoring," Mrs. Maxwell said.

"We tried to be real quiet, because I guess folks aren't so used to staying up late in little towns over here," Maxwell said.

"Are you sound sleepers?"

"Reasonably sound," Mrs. Maxwell said. "Aren't we, Ches?"

"Wouldn't sleep through a tornado or one of your bombings, but we like our shuteye."

"All right. Thank you. But I must ask you not to leave the hotel for the time being."

"We understand, Inspector. You got a problem. Can't be easy for you."

"Thank you for your consideration, Mr. Maxwell."

7.

George Bates needed hardly a glance at the body to say definitively, "I've never seen this woman before in my life, and I certainly didn't kill her."

"I didn't suggest that you had," Inspector Mothersole said.

"Well, what did you have me pulled out of an important meeting for then?"

"What is your job, Mr. Bates?"

"I am an auditor with the Trimsgate Group."

"They own Victar Brothers on the edge of town, don't they?"

"That's right. I am conducting the Group's annual audit of each subsidiary. Well, that's not quite accurate because I have responsibilities which are not, strictly speaking, part of the audit. Relating to other records, production, efficiency, personnel."

"Something of a company hatchet man?"

Bates allowed himself a slight smile and said, "I like to think my role is rather more positive than that phrase suggests."

"How long have you been in town?"

"They will have told you," Bates said, indicating the Raineys. "I've been here since Sunday night. I *was* due to leave tonight. And I still will, if I am allowed to get back to work shortly."

"I wish to get this matter cleared up as soon as possible too, Mr. Bates. But I can assure you, none of us will be going very far unless I make progress today."

Alex Rainey began to speak, but then stopped as George Bates said, "Do we have to stay in this room? I hate illness."

"The woman is not ill, Mr. Bates," Mothersole said. "She is dead."

"Yes . . . well."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Are you married, Mr. Bates?"

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"Are you married or not?"

Somewhat sullenly Bates said, "I am not. I was, for a while. But not now. Not for four years."

"What have you been doing with your evenings since Sunday?"

"I spend nearly half the year in strange towns, Inspector. I have spent the evenings this week the way I always do. A certain amount of my work can be taken back to my room. I watch that small amount of television which is bearable. And each evening I go for half an hour's walk."

"Bit unpleasant for walking lately."

"It has been cold and wet, yes. But it is my routine," Bates said.

"What time did you return from your walk last night, Mr. Bates?"

"I was here from just before ten. I took a bath, or did so as soon as Mr. Rainey sorted out my plumbing. Then I went to bed. I was asleep before eleven."

"How can you be so sure of the time?"

"I listen to *Book at Bedtime* on the radio. I don't remember the end of the episode."

"And during the night, did you hear anything or anybody?"

"Nothing whatsoever. I woke at seven sharp, as I always do. Between times I was dead to the world."

8.

Michelle Hirou was the first to answer. "No, Inspecteur. I am sorry. I have never seen this woman before now."

"Mr. Hirou?"

Gérard Hirou stood looking at the body.

Inspector Mothersole asked again, "Have you seen her before?"

"What? Oh no. Never. I was just thinking what a shame it is. A good-looking woman like this."

"You're both absolutely certain. You didn't see her in a tea shop or at Nunney Castle or at any of the places you've been visiting?"

They looked at each other and agreed, "No, we are certain."

"And you say you were in bed shortly after ten-thirty."

"That's right," Michelle Hirou said.

"May I ask how long you have been in England?"

"This is now the end of the second week," Gérard Hirou said.

"And why did you choose this time of year to come over?"

"It has been a kind of second honeymoon for us, Inspecteur."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That's not quite correct, Gérard," Michelle Hirou said.

"It is all they need."

Michelle Hirou continued, "Not so much a second honeymoon. We have come away together to find out whether we can still get along one with the other."

"I see," Mothersole said. "A kind of marital recuperation."

"Yes, I think," Michelle Hirou said.

"Your English is very good," Mothersole said.

"Thank you, but we would hope it to be so because we are both teachers of it in our French schools. It is how we met."

"Is language why you picked England to come to?"

"Well," Michelle Hirou said, "Gérard is passionately fond of holidays in the sun, on the beach *avec tous les nus.*"

"And Michelle," Gérard Hirou continued, "she loves the skiing, or shall I say *l'après ski* and the ski instructeurs."

"But you won't get either here," Mothersole said.

"Exactly."

9.

As Constable Howell opened the door to lead the Hirous back downstairs he said, "Dickie told me to say that they turned somebody up on the house to house. Somebody who saw something."

"I see," Mothersole said.

"They got her downstairs. It's an old lady and he says you ought to come down instead of making her come up."

"We'll come down then," Mothersole said.

"May I have a word first, Inspector," Alex Rainey said.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Rainey?"

"Did I gather from what you told Mr. Bates that you will be preventing people from leaving town until substantive progress on the case has been made?"

"I think you agree with me that identification of the dead woman is crucial. It will be hard for me to rule anybody out until that identification has been made."

"And that restriction on leaving would apply to us as well?"

"Most certainly, Mr. Rainey," Inspector Mothersole said, and he left the bedroom.

10.

Mrs. Westerbeck, a diminutive woman of nearly eighty, sat calmly on a chair in the guesthouse office.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So you see I do have this what they call jet lag," the old woman said in a surprisingly strong voice. "Only it be permanent, and I never been on a jet. What happens is I stay awake in the night and what sleep I do get is in the day."

"It must be very trying for you, Mrs. Westerbeck."

"It be hard to keep my mind occupied. Especially when the television goes off."

"So you sit at the window."

"Since it were double-glazed. That's right. What I do is turn on the radio and I sit by the window."

"And you saw something?"

"I'll tell you what I saw. You can decide whether it do mean anything to you or not."

"All right."

"Full moon last night after it stopped raining. I saw pretty clear. Well, what I saw was first a car drive up and a couple get out. Man and a woman it was."

"About what time was that?"

"Ten or eleven past midnight. I thought to myself, That's a late time to be coming in. Stunt your growth, that will, I thought to myself."

"What did the people do?"

"They come in the front door, with a key."

"I see. And was there anything else?"

"There was the other woman."

"Was there now?"

"Only she didn't drive up. She walked in from the road. She let herself in with a key too, and I said to myself, 'Hello hello,' I said. 'That's a pretty time of night for a woman to be out alone. Can't be up to no good, that one.' That's what I said to myself when I saw her."

"And what time of night was that, Mrs. Westerbeck?"

"Just gone two-thirty A.M."

11.

"You're keeping very quiet, Mr. Rainey," Inspector Mothersole said.

"I think," Pru said, "that Alex is depressed by the idea of having to remain here after the Peveralls get back on Sunday. Either that or he is thinking. Depression and thought are the only two reasons he is ever quiet."

"Not grown fond of our little town, then, Mr. Rainey?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No."

"Which? Depression or thought?"

"What I have been doing, Inspector, is giving your fertile imagination time to mull over your suspicion that my wife and I were involved in the murder of the woman upstairs."

"Now why would I think something like that, Mr. Rainey? Not just because of the mark on your forehead. There are other ways you could have got that than by fighting with a woman as you were suffocating her. There must be." Mothersole made much of scratching his head as if trying to think of some.

"You must be very pleased that Mrs. Westerbeck has such staying power."

"Knowing exactly how many people and of what sex went in and out through the course of the night does considerably restrict the field of possible scenarios."

"And it spares us an unknown woman appearing, as if by magic, dead in a bed."

"Funny to think of someone arriving at two-thirty A.M., entering with a key, and being murdered before morning, though."

"Mmmmm," Alex Rainey said, and was silent for a while.

"Thinking again, Mr. Rainey?"

With an extravagant sigh and a rub of his forehead, Alex Rainey said, "Yes. I was thinking what a grim *little* town this is, and how I don't want to spend a single minute more in it than I have to."

It was Mothersole's turn for silence.

Alex Rainey sat down behind the guesthouse office's desk. He leaned forward with his elbows on the blotter and he said, "Your main line of consideration, am I right, Inspector, is that the dead woman was given a night key by one of our residents and that she was killed here after she arrived. And you are giving special thought to our accountancy expert, Mr. Bates, are you not?"

"Am I?"

"Because you ask yourself, if he retires to his room each night so early, why would he ask for a night key? Is he a plotting man? Unmarried, alone in a strange town. Perhaps a man who arranges a little treat for himself on his last night in a town. A treat which went wrong this time."

"The possibility had occurred to me, Mr. Rainey."

Smiling, Alex Rainey leaned back and said, "Would you like a cup of coffee, Inspector?"

"Not just now," Mothersole said quietly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Alex," Pru asked, "do you think Mr. Bates did it?"

"No," Rainey said casually. "I think Mr. Bates is just a prudent man, protecting himself against the eventuality of finding himself locked out one night."

"So, one of the couples? The Maxwells or the Hirous?"

"Or us, my dear. Mmmm."

"Oh!"

"But I certainly agree completely with the good inspector."

The Raineys looked at Mothersole who again said nothing as he watched what was growing into a performance.

"The good inspector said that identification of the body was crucial, and I think he's absolutely right. Now, in the ordinary run of events I wouldn't dream of interfering in his case. But the idea of spending any extra time in this noxious little town . . . Well, excuse me, Inspector, but it would drive me bananas."

Mothersole continued his silence.

"Which leads me to consider a number of factors."

"Like what, Alex?" Pru asked.

"The body is left in an unbooked room in a small-town hotel in a new nightie from a chain store. No other clothing. No jewelry. It's really a highly anonymous situation. Am I right, Inspector?"

"You are, Mr. Rainey."

"And by arranging circumstances this way the killer is telling us loud and clear that identification of the body is important."

"Just so."

"Yet, nevertheless, the face is not interfered with, apart from a little faint bruising around the eyes. Nor are the fingerprints. Nor are the teeth. All things which are among the best means of identifying someone. You see, Pru?"

"What?"

"It means that the woman is not local. The good inspector is virtually invited to splash the dead woman's picture over newspapers and TV screens. But it will be to no avail. And given that newspapers and television here get national distribution, it is almost a guarantee that the woman is not even British."

"I see," Pru said.

"Which again brings us to people with foreign associations."

"Like the Maxwells or the Hirous?"

"Or us, my dear," Rainey said.

"I trust this is not the end of your little discourse, Mr. Rainey," Mothersole said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, by no means, Inspector. For instance, I will tell you that the woman was killed by someone who knew her well."

"Oh yes?"

"I said she was lightly bruised around the eyes. I think this damage came as a result of contact lenses being taken out, and none too gently. Perhaps in a hurry, but by someone who knew that she wore them, which is hardly obvious to a stranger." Rainey paused. "No comment?"

"Go on."

"The woman was also relatively wealthy."

"And why do you say that?"

"Apart from generally being well kept, there are more specific signs of affluence. And I don't just mean that her fingers show that she wore several rings. You will find—and no doubt your medical examiner will tell you this when he completes his report—that there are signs of two operations."

"So?"

"Operations which were cosmetic in nature. The scars under her breasts are in a location which suggests either an enlargement or a reduction. I'm afraid I am not adequately familiar with the two procedures to be able to tell the difference. There are also scars in what one might call the bikini region, on each leg, which relate to some kind of thigh reduction. Are these things not suggestive?"

But Rainey hardly gave Mothersole time to respond.

"In addition, you will already have noticed that the woman enjoyed a deep tan, which is well defined in the bikini region. Or shall I say, the monokini region, as there is no equivalent shading on the chest, indicating that the woman sunned topless, as they rather misleadingly describe such activity. At this time of year maintenance of a dark tan, whether by natural or artificial means, is at least consistent with a degree of affluence."

"Please don't stop now, Mr. Rainey."

"All things considered—affluence, cosmetic surgery—I would be inclined to think that the woman is of American origin."

"Are you leading me to Maxwell and his wife?" asked Inspector Mothersole.

"Yes," Rainey said sharply. "But not in the sense you mean, Inspector. I think that the dead woman *is* Chester Maxwell's wife."

"Alex!" Pru said.

"The sheerest, most impudent speculation, of course." Rainey leaned back relaxedly, enjoying the moment of revelation enormously.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I think," said Inspector Mothersole, "that you have made something of an existential leap to your conclusion, Mr. Rainey."

"Mmmmm, perhaps, perhaps," Rainey said. Then, "Still, we were led initially to the Maxwells, if you consider that the Hirous are completely wrapped up in their struggle with each other, that Mr. Bates is preoccupied with making trouble for other people, and that I would not have been involved in murdering anybody in such a boring and prosaic manner however puzzling the circumstances."

"Not exactly evidential, however," Inspector Mothersole said.

"No. But I am able to embroider my speculation in such a way as to offer you a number of points at which to test my hypothesis. Consider the overview first. Suppose Chester Maxwell and the real Candy leave their home for a period of extended foreign travel. If Candy were to disappear, or be replaced, there are no friends, neighbors, or relatives around to notice. Maxwell and the new Candy can live as man and wife in obscure foreign countries like this one for as long as they like. For a motive to murder rather than divorce, we might guess that the couple's money was Candy's rather than Chester's."

"Is that an example of one of the places to test your hypothesis?" Mothersole asked.

"In a moment," Rainey said dismissively. "Pru, you said that it was Candy who checked in and picked up the night key yesterday afternoon."

"That's right."

"Well, suppose Chester and the real Candy were together yesterday and that our Candy had the night key copied. That by some prearrangement Candy left the original key for Chester to pick up and that Chester and the real wife returned to the hotel using that key. Did your Candy ask what time we were likely to go to bed?"

"Why yes. I told her about eleven."

"And they get here at a quarter past twelve. They get upstairs without meeting anybody. He tucks Candy in—maybe she even has a sleeping pill—and he suffocates her after she has fallen asleep. Our Candy lets herself in at two-thirty to help put the body in the spare room and tidy up. When Chester and Candy come down to breakfast this morning, you recognize Mrs. Maxwell as the woman who picked the key up from you yesterday and all the bits and pieces fit."

"Yes, I see," Pru said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Points to check out," Rainey said. "First, the new Candy would need a signal to show that everything had gone smoothly and she could enter the hotel. You might ask Mrs. Westerbeck whether an upstairs light was still on here at two-thirty. Second, I would think that a close examination of the Maxwells' luggage would turn up the duplicate night key. Of course, a photograph of the dead woman sent to police in the Maxwells' own town, for showing to the Maxwells' friends and neighbors, will sort things out in a definitive fashion."

12.

Rainey lay in bed with his eyes closed and a pained expression on his face.

Seeing this, Pru said, "Come on now, it wasn't that bad. You're just tired from all that thinking."

"It's raining again," Rainey said. "What a bloody awful dark dank little country this is. One season to the next the only thing that changes is that the rain is colder or warmer."

Pru sighed, then said, "Though Inspector Mothersole tried to pass it off, he was impressed. He was definitely impressed."

"Oh, he would have got it in the end," Rainey said. "He may be steeped in the dung of English rural life, but there are no flies on Mothersole. I wouldn't have butted in, but I just couldn't bear to wait. Imagine! Extra days here!"

"Oh, it's not so bad."

Rainey was quiet for a moment before he said, "What do you mean it's not so bad?"

"Just that I rather like running a guesthouse. A lot of people passing through."

"Yes," Rainey said, mimicking, "Mr. Rainey, there's a fly in my cider. Mr. Rainey, the honeymooners next door are keeping me awake. Mr. Rainey . . . "

"Maybe I'll have a little chat with Wendy and Terry when they get back."

"I need a drink," Rainey said mournfully.

"That's a smashing idea," Pru said. "We'll drink on it."

Reluctantly, Rainey got out of bed.

"Mine with ice please, dear," Pru said. And then, "Alex, watch—"

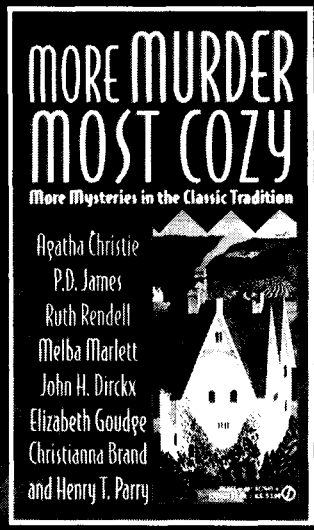
But the warning came too late as Rainey's forehead made a solid contact with the top of the bedroom doorframe. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Just when you thought it was safe to go back to the rambling country house...

MORE MURDER MOST COZY

More Mysteries in the Classic Tradition.



0-451-17649-9/$3.99 ($4.99 in Canada)

Following up on the great success of our first volume, MURDER MOST COZY, this winning second edition brings stories from the same legendary masters of the cozy together again in one great collection. Baffling, intriguing, and wonderfully engaging murder returns to vicarages and villages, boarding houses and quaint seaside resorts. Solving them, of course, are mystery-lovers' favorite sleuths—eccentric elderly ladies and irascible police detectives.

– Includes Stories by Such Cozy Penners as

AGATHA CHRISTIE,
P.D. JAMES,
RUTH RENDELL,
ELIZABETH GOUDGE,
MELBA MARLETT,
and JOHN H. DIRCKX

SIGNET

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

JOYCE HARRINGTON

Joyce Harrington is the Edgar-winning author of several mystery novels and many stories. Her work is regularly chosen by the Mystery Guild, and all her books have been published in England and translated into other languages. More than thirty of Ms. Harrington's short stories have appeared in EQMM *and other magazines: it was an* EQMM *story, "The Purple Shroud" (September, 1972) that brought her the Edgar Allan Poe award. . . .*

COP GROUPIE

by JOYCE HARRINGTON

"But what does it feel like?" she persisted. "What does it really feel like? To kill somebody?"

I looked up at her face then, at her bright, gleaming eyes, at her lips that shone in the gloom with something slick. Lip gloss, I think they call it. It's supposed to make them look sexy. Avid.

"It feels," I said, drawing the moment out, taking a mouthful of drink. It tasted like medicine, but I had no disease it could cure. "It feels like nothing at all, and that's the truth." And that was a lie. She didn't deserve better.

"You're kidding me," she said. "It's got to feel like something. Are you carrying a gun now?"

"Always. It's my wife, my mistress, my best friend. I guess that lets you out." I figured her for one who would rise to the bait.

"Show me," she whispered. "Let me hold it for a minute."

The bar was old and dark. We sat in a leatherette booth with the air conditioning making eddies of chill around our ankles and our

© 1993 by Joyce Harrington.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

glasses sweating clear puddles onto the red Formica tabletop. She'd come in when I was about two drinks along and eyed me from the bar until I waved her over.

"Have another drink?" I asked her, and finished mine off. She was drinking gin and orange juice, a combination only a mother could love. Mine had, until the day she died.

This one called herself Rusty. She had red hair. It might even have been her own, bright carrot under bright lights, veering toward purple in the shadows that clustered around the booth.

I got up and went to the bar. It was a carry-your-own kind of place. No waitress. Not many customers either. Just some of the neighborhood old faithful clustered at the end where the television muttered a baseball game. It wasn't my neighborhood or my baseball game. Just a hot night in August when prowling the streets felt better than lying in bed, staring at the dark and trying not to think.

The bartender sloshed the drinks down in front of me and waited, incurious, for my money. I paid him, and left a chintzy tip in the spilled orange juice. It's only a mood, I told myself, you'll get over it. You'll feel better very soon now.

"So, tell me about yourself," I said, sliding back into the booth. I could have told her her life story. She probably could have told me mine, if she thought about it at all. And the two wouldn't have been so different.

When she got to the failed marriage part, and the kid who was living with her mother, she was ready for another drink.

"I'm buying this time," she said, "and then you can tell me what made you decide to be a cop."

She made a detour to the ladies' room on her way to the bar and I tinkered with the idea of walking out. It was the right thing to do. But as my mother always said, "Mikey, knowing the right thing is easy. It's doing it that's hard."

She came back, teetering a little in her high-heeled sandals, carrying a little bag of Cheez Doodles along with the drinks. "I wouldn't trust the food in this place. I peeked in the kitchen. What a pigpen!"

"People don't come here to eat," I said. "You hungry?"

"A little," she said.

I willed her to take the thought further and invite me up to her place. She didn't. "We can go someplace," I prompted.

"Maybe," she said. "Later. First, tell me what makes a guy like you take a job that pays you peanuts for risking your neck every

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

day of your life." She sipped daintily at her drink, every inch a lady, but her eyes were unfocused.

I laughed. It was my bitter, rueful laugh number three. Not too bitter, only slightly rueful, with just a hint of self-deprecation. "My old man," I muttered, staring down at my knuckles. One of them had an old scab on it, almost ready to fall off. From the last time I'd had to get tough with someone. "My old man, he was a cop. Not a very good cop, or a smart one. I guess it runs in the family."

"Following in his footsteps, huh?" She was nodding as if she understood. "Only doing it your way. Better. You'll show him."

What could she understand? Nothing. Nada. Zilch. None of them could. Correction. None of them had. So here we go again, Mikey, lad.

I raised my head and looked around the bar. It looked familiar, but I couldn't remember if I'd ever been here before. There are hundreds, thousands of these dingy, evil-smelling neighborhood saloons all over the city. They take their flavor from their location—Irish, Italian, black, Hispanic—but they all seemed to have grown out of the hard sidewalks and the hard thirsts of the clientele. I ought to know. My old man had a thirst like a pile driver after they booted him off the force. He died in a booth just like the one we were sitting in. Could have been the same one for all I know. I was away at the time, on the road, seeing the great U.S. of A. and trying to figure out if there was some place in it for me.

I guess there is. And I guess I'm sitting in it.

"You're not very talkative." She'd polished off the Cheez Doodles and was licking the yellow off her fingers, one by one. Trying to be provocative.

"Nothing much to tell. Ah, Christ! Let's get out of here. This place gives me the creeps."

"Me too," she said, gathering up her shoulder bag. She was wearing one of those short, tight skirts that clung to her rump and thighs like a second skin as far as it went before the real skin took over. A cropped sleeveless blouse left a stretch of tanned midsection bare to the night breeze. If there'd been a breeze. I walked behind her to the door, watching her haunches sway from side to side. Her blouse was almost sheer, and there weren't any bra straps showing through. She might as well have been naked, the bitch.

Outside, on the sidewalk, she looked both ways up and down the deserted street. "Maybe we should have called for a cab," she murmured, nervously. "We'll never find one here."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Don't worry," I told her. "I've got my car. It's parked right down that alley." I nodded toward a narrow stretch of deep night between two shuttered industrial buildings across the street.

She smiled up at me. "I don't know why I'm being such a chicken," she murmured coyly. "I guess it's all those women you read about in the newspapers. How many have there been now? Five?"

"Six," I told her. And it was only partly a lie. Soon there would be six. "You shouldn't be out by yourself at night. Talking to strangers."

She shrugged, and her cropped blouse lifted to show the roundness of heavy breasts. "What can happen to me? I'm with a cop. You should try staying home alone, night after night. You could go bonkers."

So. She lived alone and didn't like it. Time for the direct approach. "You got anything to eat at your place? Like you said, on a job that pays peanuts, there's not much left over for elegant restaurant dining."

She frowned, but I could tell it was a pretense. "I really shouldn't," she said. "What if you're not a cop after all? What if you're the one who's been cutting up all those girls?"

I pulled out my badge. "Show you my gun, too," I offered. "I'll even let you hold it. But not right here."

She guffawed. "I bet you will. I just bet you will."

She took my arm and let me guide her across the street and into the alley. As the darkness enveloped us, she pressed closer to my side. She was small. The top of her head barely reached my shoulder. And she was trembling.

"Don't be frightened," I whispered, bending low to nibble at her ear.

She jumped as if I'd bitten a chunk out of it. "Don't do that!" she squealed. But she clung closer to my side and when we reached my car, she got in quickly and locked the door.

She felt safe with me. And why not? A cop is supposed to protect dumb little bimbos from their own stupidity. Not to mention, they think cops are sexy as hell. That's why so many of them are cop groupies. That's why it's so easy to go home with them.

Her refrigerator held leftover Chinese food, a package of Devil Dogs, and a few lonesome eggs. I started whipping up an omelet using the tired shrimp and broccoli as a filling. She put some water on to boil for instant coffee.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I never would have thought of doing that," she said of the omelet. "I'm not much of a cook. Usually, I eat at the restaurant where I work, but today was my day off."

While I was cooking and she was in the bathroom repairing her makeup, I checked out the kitchen drawers. It's always better to use one of their own knives. No need to dump it afterwards. No possibility of tracing it.

Nothing but a dime-store utility knife, none too sharp. But it would do.

The omelet was done and she was still in the bathroom. I'd let her eat first, tell her cop stories. That always got them excited. Then, when she couldn't wait to get her clothes off . . .

I knocked on the bathroom door. "Food's ready," I called out.

"Be right there," she answered.

And right there she was. Wearing a whore's delight of a negligee, red satin and lace with little black ribbons all over it. Some kind of heavy perfume that almost made me choke. This one was just asking for it. Well, I sure don't like to disappoint a lady.

I goggled at her and gave a long, low whistle. The expected response. She simpered at me. "You like?"

"I like a lot," I told her. "Maybe we should just forget about the omelet."

"Not a chance," she said. "I really am starving. It'd be real unromantic if my stomach started growling. Besides, I want to hear more about your adventures."

She actually said that. Adventures. Oh, Rusty, you little slut, could I tell you adventures! Things you'd really get off on. How I cut up those other five. How they begged me to stop. The things they offered to do if I would only not hurt them. They didn't understand that it's not sex. It's more of a clean-up action. Getting the trash off the streets. The human trash.

We sat down opposite each other on folding chairs at her little card table. Genteel as all get out, with a white tablecloth and mismatched china. The knife handy to cut up a half loaf of not quite fresh Italian bread.

She had put a tape in the cassette player. Somebody moaning about the woman he had always dreamed of. Her idea of music to screw around by. So predictable. This one was going to be easy. No sweat. In fact, it was all getting to be too easy. Not satisfying. Maybe it was time to broaden the hunting ground. Go for a higher class clientele. Think about it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She was saying something. "Sorry," I said. "I was thinking about the case I'm working on."

"I said the omelet is very good. Aren't you going to have some?"

I chuckled. That always disarms them. "Sometimes I forget to eat. When I'm working or when I'm having a good time."

"So what case are you working on? Or can you tell? I don't want to hear any secret stuff."

Not much you don't. "Don't worry. I won't tell you anything that hasn't been in the papers already. I'm working on the stabbing of all those girls." That was no lie. "I guess I should say women, but a couple of them were just teenagers. It's disgusting the way they were cut up."

"Now don't go getting gruesome on me. I get enough bad dreams about it already."

I picked up the knife and hacked off a chunk of bread. "The killer used ordinary kitchen knives, just like this one."

She stifled a little shriek and swallowed hard at the food in her mouth. "Let's talk about something else," she whispered.

"No," I said. "I can't. This is what I live with. Day and night. I thought maybe you could take my mind off it."

She stared at me for a moment, then murmured, "Heavy. Very heavy." She took hold of my hand, right hand, knife hand, and stroked it. Drew faint white lines on it with her pointed red nails. "Lighten up, Mike," she whispered. "This is supposed to be fun."

Still holding my hand, she drew me out of my chair and curled herself into my body. I put one arm, left arm, around her and held her close. Kissed her long and deep. And all the while my right hand was finding the knife on the table behind me, getting just the right grip on it. The only question that remained was whether to do it here or in the bedroom. She answered it for me.

With her lips locked on mine, she started swaying and guiding me toward the open bedroom door. I let her move me, inching backward while her body pressed urgently against me. Ah, Rusty, soon, soon you'll be free of all this. You'll be purified. And you'll thank me for returning you to innocence.

The light in the bedroom was dim, the bed a gaudy display of lavender satin with a huge white teddy bear propped against the pillows. She broke away from me to fling herself on it and bury her face in the bear's synthetic fur. "I hope you don't think I make a habit of this," she whispered. "I really like you, Mike." The bed had a headboard—brass rails. Perfect.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And I like you, Rusty. More than you know." The knife was hidden behind my back. I sat down on the bed and slipped it beneath one of the pillows. I got out the handcuffs, both sets.

She sat up when she heard their metallic rattle. She held the teddy bear in front of her, as if it could protect her.

"Oh no you don't," she said. "No kinky stuff. I don't care if you are a cop."

"But, Rusty, I'm not a cop now. I'm off duty. And you'll enjoy this. I promise." I flatter myself that I can be very persuasive. Some of the others had been reluctant, but I'd been able to win them over with promises of things they had never experienced. I wasn't lying to them.

But she was stubborn. And she was becoming suspicious. "I think you'd better go now," she said. Her grip on the bear had tightened and she was trembling. "I think you aren't a cop at all. I think you really are the one who's been killing all those girls."

I had to laugh. She was so serious, so scared. "And what if I told you I am? What would you do then?"

"Are you?" Her voice was weak. Her eyes filmed over with fear.

"Of course I am, Rusty. And since you've been so clever, I'm going to make sure you have the experience of a lifetime. And there's not a thing you can do about it." I reached for her arm with one set of handcuffs ready to snap closed.

"Oh, isn't there?" The gun appeared out of nowhere, or rather out of the back of the bear. "For one thing, I'm a police officer. And for another, I'm placing you under arrest."

"A decoy! Rusty, you should be ashamed of yourself." I was well within my rights to scold her. She looked and behaved like a whore. No self-respecting police officer should do that. Besides, my father always said they should never have allowed women on the force.

They took women on, but they wouldn't take me. Some bullshit about an old drug bust. I had to pretend, with a fake badge and a real gun. And the real gun was in my hand, aimed at Rusty's head. "You can shoot me," I told her. "But not before I get one off. At this range it'll be quick but it won't be pretty. I'd much rather take it slow and easy. The way I did with the others. Who knows? I might even let you live. Now, be a good girl and put that gun down!" The last was a shout. That was a mistake. It's always a mistake to lose control.

"Do you really think I'm here alone, without a backup?" she asked. "Do you think we don't know who you are, Mikey? We've been fol-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lowing you for weeks, ever since the last one. She lived long enough to tell us about a cop whose father was a cop. The same story you told me. She gave us a pretty good description. Poor kid, she didn't know what a phoney you are. A nut case."

"You lie! She was dead!" Calm down, I told myself. This is not the way. The correct way is to remain calm and in charge.

But I really didn't want to shoot Rusty. There's no satisfaction in that. And I didn't care if she shot me. That was my great strength. That, and knowing that she'd rather make the collar than bring in a corpse. I reached again for her arm. She backed away and got off the bed.

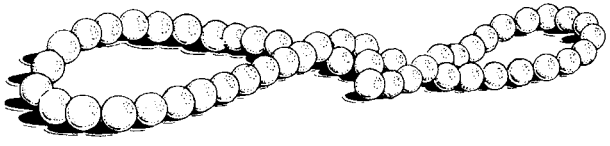
"It was one of your father's old buddies who told us about you," she said. "He told us you were always doing weird things when you were a kid. Killing stray cats. Setting fires. Broke your mother's heart and drove your father to drink. That's what he said. Always hanging around the precinct, making a pest of yourself. I remember his exact words. 'It's a damn good thing they didn't let him join. The guy's a looney.' Did you do those things, Mikey?"

"So what if I did? What are you trying to do? Make me believe I'm nuts? Think I'm going to break down and start feeling sorry for myself? Not a hope! I know what I'm doing, and I've wasted enough time listening to you. It's your call, Rusty, or whatever your name is. Either I blow your head off now, or you give me your gun and let me get on with it. Don't you see there's no way out of it?"

"Okay, guys," she called out. "I think we've got enough now."

The closet door opened and suddenly the room was full of large men with grim faces and drawn revolvers. I raised my own gun to my head but Rusty was on me like a pit bull, leaping over the bed, snarling and spitting. The gun went flying. I tried to dive for the knife under the pillow, but she kneed me in the groin and I bent double. And all the while the smell of her cheap perfume was in my nostrils.

The most embarrassing thing was that they cuffed me with my own handcuffs. And thought it was a big joke. One of them called me a cop groupie. They all laughed at that. Even Rusty. Too bad. I was really getting to like her. She would have been the best of them.

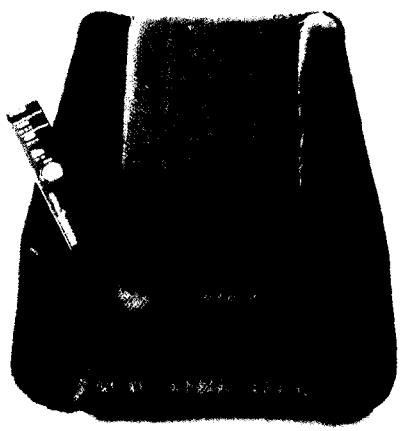


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

▼ THE MAGICAL SPARE BED

It's almost like pulling an extra bed out of a hat. Unlike most spare beds that gobble up storage space and are unwieldy to move, this one rolls down to fit a 36"-long, 3"-diameter canvas case, to stash in a closet corner, car trunk, camper, anywhere. Yet it unrolls in minutes to a full-size 27" x 73" bed that will even accommodate 6-footers, supports up to 500 pounds and is comfortable to boot. The secret's in the inventive construction: a cotton canvas sling is supported on laminated steel legs with 6 steel springs for cushioning and stability on rough ground. Toss the carrying strap over your shoulder and go — camping, beach, poolside, the 10" legs keep it off damp ground and sand. Of course, this bed is indispensable at home, country home, dorm — even for kids in motel rooms. A superb value at **$61.98** ($12.25) #A1931.



▼ BACK RELIEF BY POLLENEX

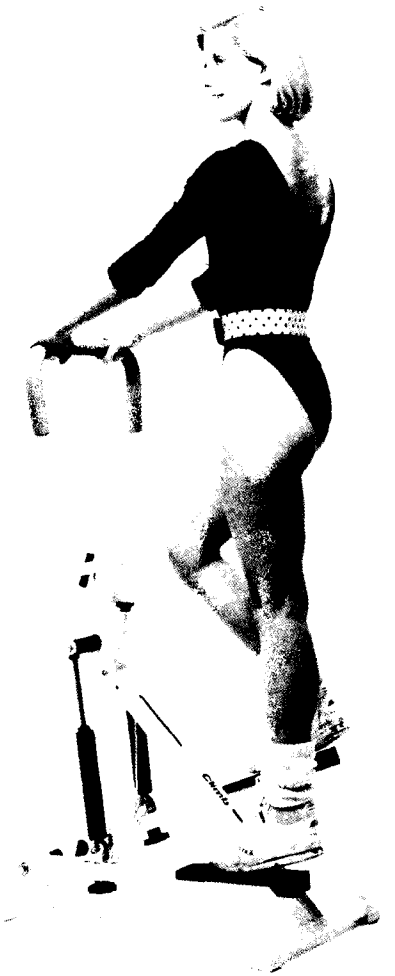
Are you one of the millions of Americans who suffers from low back pain? Do hours of prolonged sitting leave you aching or numb? If so, then the Pollenex Back Relief is just what the doctor ordered. Back Relief's unique design cradles your back in comfort and features multiple combinations of massage and heat. The inflatable lumbar cushion conforms to the shape of your back. Dual massaging elements can be used separately or together for full back massage. Handy remote control lets you select upper/lower massage, low and high intensity as well as heat control. And the soothing massager works 2 ways - adapter #1 plugs into any indoor electrical outlet while adapter #2 plugs into car, van, or truck cigarette lighter. So Back Relief is perfect for car, home, or office. Plush, durable fabric cover adds extra comfort. **$119.98** ($6.75) #A2001.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

▼ STEP UP TO A HEALTHIER YOU

Doctors, physical trainers, and athletes agree that stair climbing is one of the best forms of aerobic exercise. You can achieve your fitness goals without the severe jarring or pounding associated with running or jogging. That's why the foldaway ExerClimb™ is the perfect piece of exercise equipment. The ExerClimb™ improves cardiovascular function, increases endurance, burns body fat, and conditions major muscle groups to tighten and tone upper body, thighs, hips, buttocks, and calves. And results can be seen with a twenty minute workout three times a week. It is quiet enough to let you exercise while watching TV. or listening to your favorite music. The hydraulic powered ExerClimb™ features sturdy steel construction, magnum series shocks and individual tension adjustment to insure a high intensity, low impact workout. Compact and lightweight (28 lbs.) this incredible machine fits in virtually any size room. When opened for use, it measures 28"H x 27"L x 16"W. Plus, its unique foldaway feature makes carrying and storage a snap. Perfect to take along to your office, trips, or almost anywhere. Some assembly required, using only screwdriver and pliers. For all these great features, one would expect to pay much more, but the ExerClimb™ has a very trim price tag. So now there is no reason not to "step" into better shape. Ninety day warranty. **$119.98** ($15.00) #A1998.



TO ORDER: Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL** DEPT. 073EL , P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-722-9999**. NJ residents add 7% sales tax. We honor MasterCard, Visa, and American Express. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. **30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund.**

Magalog Marketing Group Inc. · 1991

1905 Swarthmore Ave., Lakewood, N.J. 08701

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

What will the state of the criminal justice system be in the fast-approaching twenty-first century? As Mr. Bankier imagines it here, in a futuristic Los Angeles, it will be nothing if not expedient. . . .

EVIL IN THE AIR

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Elsa Krause sat by the hotel room window with Los Angeles covering much of the planet twenty-five floors below. She was observing her husband as he conducted a telephone conversation. He was good, he was very good.

That line rang a bell. Recently, she had watched a movie, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold.* In it, Richard Burton dismissed an American agent with intense sarcasm. "I'll tell them you were good. You were very good."

Helmut Krause was roving. The sound-swivel telephone rested on a bedside table. It moved like a cobra, pointing its mouthpiece wherever the voice went.

Krause was talking to Tiny Tim Freedom, Chief Executive Officer of Airschemes, Inc. "I've been weighing your plan, Tim." Krause's Bavarian accent was a humble lisp. "It could be a breakthrough in mass execution."

Freedom's voice rumbled out of the speaker. "You can understand I must keep the idea quiet. When can we get together?"

"We'll be at the baseball stadium this afternoon. Why don't you join us in the owners' box?"

"Thanks." Freedom shifted gears from business to fun. "Do you Germans really think you can beat Dodger pitching?"

© 1993 by William Bankier.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We can only try."

"Give Elsa my love."

"She's here."

"See you this afternoon, Tim!" Elsa called. The telephone swung, the call ended, the machine dropped its head.

"That man is completely immoral." Krause drew up a chair and poured himself coffee. He was fit as a sprinter. His wife was comfortably overweight. Her face was that of a cherub in a Renaissance painting. "But his idea means big bucks for my company."

"Building flimsy gliders," Elsa said scornfully.

"They only have to fly once."

"And crash. And kill everybody on board."

"These are people condemned to death. This is capital punishment. There are too many of them to execute one at a time." Krause recalled Freedom's description. "A powered airplane tows the glider aloft and takes it someplace over the desert. The pilot cuts the glider loose. Its controls are set for a steep dive." He sealed his argument. "No need to buy cyanide pellets or sulphuric acid. Or the equipment to combine them."

"This is wrong. It was always wrong."

Krause put butter on a croissant and took a bite. "What's the alternative? More prisons? Do you know what it costs to build a prison? And how long it takes? We would need camps. You want camps?"

Elsa was thinking of her grandfather who had lived outside Hamburg and remembered the saturation bombing, the firestorm. He told her, when she was a child, about what he had seen of the eighty-thousand dead. "We need to do something," she told her husband, "so people start to care whether they live or die. If their lives remain frustration and degradation, why should they care what happens to them?"

"My sweet philosopher wife," Krause said.

"They're like kids who can't go to the fair," Elsa insisted. "They go mad, they destroy their bedrooms."

The World Series was being played in Los Angeles that year. First time in a long time. The Dodgers were matched against the Bremerhaven Bears, the champions. Last year's Series took place in Germany, so it was America's turn.

After game one, which the Dodgers lost, the crowd left Hollypark Stadium in an ugly mood. Sid Scarney, one of a dozen valet-parking

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

attendants, was waiting for the players to appear. He did not want to miss that no-good Harper.

As he watched, another fender-bender happened down the lane. Most people were driving electric cars, made in Mexico. The development of the jalapeño battery put them ahead—copper electrodes in a solution of hot peppers with baking soda and distilled water.

Scarney was talking on his cellular phone with his wife, Babs. She had called, she told him, from the Topanga condo. She was writing gags for the president's next speech. It was a thankless job, but she did it for the money. Which was never enough.

"Why don't you hit on that creep Garney Keeble for a raise?"

"Funny you should mention Garney," Babs said. "I was thinking of him earlier today. Maybe I'll talk to him."

There had not been a decent stand-up first executive since Jenny Youngman, granddaughter of a legendary purveyor of one-liners. The job was split now, six months in office, six out, between the Demopubs and the Repocrats. Neither party wanted it full time. Garney Keeble was talking about adding a laugh track.

"Are you coming home soon?" Babs asked.

"Not until that bum Harper comes out. I'll get him his car and then I'll tell him what I think of him."

Zino Harper was the Dodger catcher. In the ninth inning, with Germans on second and third and two men out, the Dodger pitcher struck out the third man. But Harper dropped the third strike, so the batter took off for first base. Harper flipped off his mask, found the ball, and threw wildly into right field. Two runs scored. The home team could not make it up in the bottom of the ninth. They went one game down in the Series.

"I could kill that guy," Scarney raged.

"Bite your tongue. Everything you say goes into the computer."

The parking lot population had thinned out. Scarney went to stand near the exit from which the players would emerge. A short man with crisp yellow hair and well-proportioned limbs, he looked natty in his fluorescent blue jacket.

From a distance, he heard the amplified voice of the track announcer calling the running of the tenth race. Once upon a time, thoroughbred racing had been the only event held at the Inglewood location. Now there was group boxing, skateboard demolition, and, of course, baseball.

"Hey, Sid!" It was Zino Harper, hurrying out of the archway. He was a squat individual, 220 pounds on a five-foot frame. A straight

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nose and one black eyebrow made a letter T in the florid face. Harper looked stressed. There seemed to be more on his mind than just a wild throw into right field. "Bring my car!"

Scarney got the keys from the box. "You blew it, Zino."

"The first baseman should have caught the ball."

"A Watusi on stilts could not have caught that throw."

"Get the car."

Harper drove an ancient Buick, black and white, with a large gold star on the door and the words "State Trooper." It was a souvenir of a holiday in Little Rock, a museum piece.

Braking so hard the car rocked for ten seconds, Scarney got out and left the door open and the engine running. "You gave the Krauts the game!"

Harper reacted to what was on his mind. "I better warn Jack," he said mostly to himself. He ran back through the archway and disappeared.

Scarney was left muttering. "I want to go home. I could murder that guy."

Babs Scarney was sitting cross-legged on the carpet, playing solitaire with a worn-out deck of Bicycles. "Sid, are you by any chance worried about something?"

Her husband was using a remote in either hand to switch channels on the wall-TV. Like a gunslinger, he kept firing away. The picture was changing so fast, the sound never caught up. "What, me worry?" he said.

"I wondered if maybe you've done something bad. And you're not telling me."

Scarney's mind seemed only half there. "You're probably sensing my normal concern. Whether my wife is cheating on me with Garney Keeble."

"That's absurd."

"I assumed you were here writing gags. But I get home from the stadium and you show up later than me."

"Not by much."

"Where did you go?"

"Out to buy cigarettes." Babs displayed a pack.

"You don't smoke."

"I'm thinking of starting."

Scarney stopped switching when he came to the Punishment Channel. Shaven-headed prisoners were filing into a mass gas cham-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ber. The commentator was saying, "We're looking at a mixed bag here in Sacramento on this, the tenth execution of the summer season. We have rapists, kidnappers, child abusers, drive-by assassins. The tall man who entered the fuselage just then is Guthrie Parr, convicted of assisting his wife's suicide six weeks ago in San Diego. She was twenty-eight years old, you may recall, and was suffering from an unidentified allergy."

It was, in fact, an airplane fuselage in which the mass execution would take place. A 747 had been stripped of cockpit, wing, and engines, tail assembly and landing gear, so that only the passenger compartment remained. Condemned prisoners were seated in rows, buckled in, and served a not-very-hearty dinner on trays by a team of guards. Those who wished to could put on earphones and view the movie. It was always the same one—*The Graduate,* starring Dustin Hoffman.

The mass executions served two purposes. They cut into the backlog of prisoners in Death City, which had reached a total of 185,000 nationwide. And, conveniently, the innovation provided much-needed work for an aircraft industry starved for contracts. Now that the procedure had been proven in California, fuselages were being built and shipped to every state in the union. Some had been sold to advanced countries overseas.

Condemned prisoners applied a morbid sense of humor to the experience. They called it, "Going for the Boeing."

"How can you watch that?" Babs said. She was cheating, changing the position of cards already played. She had learned there was every bit as much pleasure in winning a game of solitaire this way.

"Everything else is boring," Sid told her.

"They're killing those people."

"They killed people themselves."

"Don't you feel sorry for them?"

Sid took the question seriously. He cast his mind back to the days when an individual was led into a claustrophobic chamber not much bigger than a diving bell. This, he remembered, was sad. It was personal. It was also stupid; an example of how society always managed to screw up. Most murders had a certain amount of style. An execution was as embarrassing as a play put on by amateurs.

"I don't feel sorry," he told his wife. "I haven't the time."

"Society should not be killing all those people."

"What should society do?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Before Babs could answer, the doorbell sounded. Sid went to the door. "Who is it?"

"Police. Open up."

Sid peered through the peephole. He saw several uniformed men pressed against walls with guns drawn. Two others held a battering ram. He opened the door.

The officers rushed in yelling, "Freeze!" and "Don't move!" and "On the floor!" They were screaming so hard, their voices broke. Spit flew. Babs got down on the floor. So did Sid.

There was a video cameraman and a girl with a microphone boom. It turned out the event was being taped for use on a TV show. When the action was over, the crew left and the cops calmed down. "Sid, we have to take you downtown and book you," the officer in charge said.

Scarney was standing now, hands wired behind his back. "What's the charge?"

"Murder, first."

"Who is he supposed to have killed?" Babs asked. "He came here straight from work."

"That's where he did it," the cop said. "He went to get Zino Harper's car. After he came back with it, he ran Harper against the stadium wall. Crushed him to death."

The private detective had an honest face. He made it pink by rubbing it with both hands. Babs Scarney sat on a metal chair, watching him and her husband with equal respect. "Tell me what really happened," he said.

Scarney was profoundly depressed. Everything was happening so quickly, his life expectancy running out like beer from a small bottle. His trial had lasted only half an hour, tacked onto the end of more notorious proceedings—an entire family gunned down over Thanksgiving dinner by preteen daughters. Scarney's execution in the fuselage was scheduled for eleven days from now. He said, "It's too late to save me."

"Mr. Fuller is good," Babs said. "He's very good."

"Detectives have names like Sam Spade, or Gus Bucket. What kind of a name is Buckminster Fuller?"

"It's not hard to understand," the private eye explained. "My father's name was Fuller. My mother's maiden name was Buckminster. Talk to me so I can help you." When the condemned man still hesitated, Fuller told him, "Your wife scraped together sixty dollars

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to pay for this investigation. Let's do it." Instead of facing runaway inflation, too much money chasing too few goods, the country was cash poor. These days a real fine salary was fifty bucks a week.

They were seated in what had been the principal's office. A guard stood outside the door. He was old; he had guarded the same door against armed students when the place had been a school. Scarney had been brought from his cubicle in the gymnasium. The once-derelict buildings now served as holding pens for prisoners on the short glidepath to the fuselage.

"I went and got Harper's car and brought it to the gateway where he was waiting." Scarney sighed. "I got out. The door was open, the engine was idling. He says he has to talk to somebody and he runs back inside the stadium. I wanted to go home. I left."

Fuller waited for more. He said, "That's it?"

"That evening, the cops came and took me."

The detective had a head as bald as a geodesic dome. He massaged it now, as if to stimulate his brain. "Did Harper say who he had to talk to?"

Scarney snapped the wristband on his spandex prison suit. "He said, 'I better warn Jack.' "

"Did you tell this to the police?"

"They never asked."

"They're busy." Babs shrugged her shoulders and smiled forgiveness.

Tiny Tim Freedom produced one of his majestic frowns. His eyebrows were shelves of crisp red hair. "Elsa," he said, "I've got to get out of this town."

The unfaithful Bavarian wife was now trying to handle guilt along with boredom and alienation. But her perception was acute. "Who are you running from?" She continued getting dressed in Freedom's bathroom.

"Can I level with you?"

"Of course."

"I killed a man, last week at the ballpark. Beat him to death. After I left you and Helmut. I had my reasons. The police have arrested somebody else. He's been tried, convicted, and sentenced."

"So?"

"Things happen. A witness might come forward. I'd rather not be here."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Elsa Krause tossed things into her handbag. She looked at herself in a mirror, saw a weary face. "I don't want you coming to Germany."

"That's the point I'm raising."

"Stay here. You living in Europe will make trouble between me and my husband."

"If the deal goes through, the gliders will be built in Germany. Airschemes will close down. Part of the contract will be an executive post for me. I'd like to make the move now."

"I think you're worrying over nothing," Elsa said.

Bucky Fuller finished his conversation with the ball player's widow. He put down the telephone and stepped away from the street kiosk. "Mrs. Harper had no problem identifying the 'Jack' her husband wanted to warn. Her brother's name is Jack."

Babs Scarney hooked her thumbs in the purse chain encircling her waist. "I wonder what Zino was warning him about?"

Fuller hailed a taxi. "She gave me an address. Let's go and find out."

The place was a security apartment building on Normandie. The street gate was hanging off its hinges. There was no water in the swimming pool. Fuller led the way to unit 107. He pressed the buzzer.

Eventually, the peephole opened. A muffled voice said, "Who are you?"

"Friends of your sister."

"Is this about Zino?"

"Yes."

"I don't want any trouble."

"We just want to ask a few questions."

After a pause, a chain was dropped and a couple of latches were thrown. The door edged open to reveal a man in his thirties dressed in wrinkled pants and a soiled white shirt with the buttons undone. His feet were bare. Unshaven and bleary-eyed, he looked like two days after New Year's Eve.

"Jack Lafferty? I'm Buckminster Fuller. This is Babs Scarney. Can we come in?"

Lafferty backed out of the way and they moved inside. It was a tiny apartment, littered with newspapers, smelling of beer. The tenant came to stand beside them. He picked up a long-necked bottle and took a swig. "I'd offer you one of these," he said, "but I only have three left."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You heard about the trial?" Fuller said. "They convicted this lady's husband of killing Zino Harper."

"Sorry about that," Lafferty said. He released a resonant belch.

"We believe Scarney didn't do it. We're trying to find out who did. Our only clue is something he heard Zino say. Scarney parks cars at the stadium. He came back with Zino's car. Then Zino said, 'I have to warn Jack.' And he went inside."

Lafferty went to a desk where he uncovered a telephone answering machine. "I was out on a toot. I work shifts at Airschemes. When I build up time off, I take it all at once. I was gone for a few days. When I came back, there was a message on here from Zino." Lafferty pressed a button. "If he said he had to warn Jack, this must be it."

A series of beeps and bursts of static came out of the machine. Then a voice began to speak. "Hey, Jack, are you there? Pick up. Listen, it's Zino. I'm at the ballpark. I just heard something. Two guys were talking in the tunnel. This American guy is somebody big at Airschemes. He's talking about building all these gliders. But not here, in Germany. The German guy says fine, but what about trouble when the California plant closes. The American guy says no problem. The workers will yell, but what can they do? Hey, Jack. They're getting ready to disappear your job."

There was a pause. Then Zino seemed to turn his head. "Hands off, buddy," he yelled. A male voice said, "How much did you hear, my friend?" In Lafferty's room, the trio listened to a struggle followed by the sound of footsteps running away with others in pursuit. Lafferty switched off the machine.

"We can imagine what happened," Fuller said. "The person who interrupted the phone call chased Zino. And killed him."

"Why?"

"Because Zino overheard an incriminating conversation. The Airschemes person doesn't want word to get out about closing the plant. Moving jobs to Germany. He followed Zino, heard what he was saying on the telephone. Then he killed him."

Lafferty said, "I understood the cops found him crushed by his own car."

"Good way to divert suspicion," Fuller suggested. "His car was there with the engine running. Your husband had gone away, Babs. So the killer propped Zino against the stadium wall. He was dead already or just unconscious, it doesn't matter. He ran the car into him and crushed him."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The police presumed it was Sid," Babs said, "because he had the keys, he brought the car. And he'd been spouting off about Zino losing the game."

The detective opened the answering machine. "Can we have this tape as evidence?"

Lafferty nodded. He said, "And I think I know who did it. I recognize the voice on the tape. His name is Freedom. Tiny Tim Freedom. He's the boss. He made a speech to the union members in the plant last month. A pep talk. He always talks teamwork. But he never fooled us. We knew he'd grab the only boat if ever the ship was sinking."

The cabdriver transported them swiftly through areas of likely sniper fire. Babs asked, "Shouldn't we take the tape to the police?"

"They might or might not respond," the detective said. "Your husband is due to be executed in six days. There's no time to mess around."

"Who else can help us? We can't appeal to Freedom."

The cab pulled up in front of a high-rise hotel. Fuller shoved money to the driver through a slot in the bulletproof shield. "I'm going to play the tape for the only other person who may listen to reason."

The desk clerk spoke the detective's name over the telephone to the guest in room 2525. The visitors rode an express elevator. Helmut Krause was waiting with the door open. "When I heard your name," he said, "I had to welcome you. I've read many books about famous Americans. I have the greatest respect for your illustrious ancestor."

Buckminster Fuller looked puzzled. "My ancestors all worked for the post office." He took the tape cassette from his pocket. "I want you to help us save a man's life." He went on to outline the murder of Zino Harper, the wrongful arrest and conviction of Sid Scarney, and his belief that the true killer could be identified by the message and the voice on the tape.

"What led you to me?" Krause asked, when the tape had been played twice on Fuller's pocket machine.

"I'm a private eye. I have friends with connections. One of them contacted the stadium and discovered who hosted Tiny Tim Freedom on the day of the first Series game. The computer said Freedom was the guest of Herr Helmut Krause, part owner of the Bremerhaven Bears. The hotel guide said you were staying here."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Krause glanced at his watch. "My wife will be back soon. I'd like to finish this."

"So would I," Babs said. "My husband is due to be executed for a murder he didn't commit."

Krause decided to talk. With this detective in the game, the deal with Tiny Tim Freedom was prejudiced. Not to worry. He would reestablish himself with some other executive when Freedom was out of the way. "You're right," he said. "That is Freedom's voice on the tape. We had our discussion. Then my wife and I left the stadium. The beating must have happened after that."

A key turned in the lock and the door opened. Elsa Krause strode in and tossed a couple of shopping bags on the bed. Her husband kissed her cheek and introduced her to the visitors. Elsa was staring at Babs.

"I've seen you before," she said.

"I don't think so."

"I never forget a face. You were at the stadium last week when Helmut and I left. In the parking lot. I remember asking myself who is that pretty woman lurking behind a pillar."

Fuller's mind was racing. He studied his client's eyes; his suspicions were confirmed by what he saw. "Thank you, Herr Krause," he said. "We needn't bother you any longer."

When the visitors left, Krause said, "Your hair is damp." He smiled sadly at his wife. "Did you shower again at the shopping center?"

In the elevator, neither the detective nor Babs Scarney said a word. In the hotel lobby, Fuller led the young woman into the bar where he sat her down at a corner table and ordered drinks. When they came, he said, "I believe Frau Krause. You were at the stadium. Care to tell me about it?"

Babs swallowed her whiskey at a gulp. The detective pushed his glass in front of her and she drank that one, too. "All right," she said. "It's too late to get Sid off. I knew that from the start. Sid is a loser. A millstone around my neck. With him gone, I can accept Garney Keeble's offer. He's the executive editor on the presidential gag-writing team. He wants me to move with him to Washington. We'll get married." She had saved the most important inducement for last. "And more of my stuff will get used."

"Never happen," Fuller said gently. "How did the murder go down?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I spoke to Sid on my cellular phone. He assumed I was at home. I was on the other side of the parking lot. My plan was to sneak up on him and crack his skull. Just another midtown mugging. I crossed over and waited for him to get Zino's car. Then I saw him walk away and leave it with the engine running. I was about to follow him when I saw Zino Harper appear in the archway. This huge guy was all over him, beating on him. That must have been Freedom. He left Harper on the ground. Dead, for all he knew."

"Freedom is as guilty as you are," Fuller murmured.

"I ran over and checked the man on the ground. He was alive. The idea came to me on the spot, a way to implicate Sid in a murder. He'd be executed and I wouldn't have to kill him. Executions happen so fast nowadays, he'd be gone, case closed."

"So you heaved Zino up and leaned him against a wall. Then you got in the car and put it in gear and rammed him."

"It was awful," she confirmed. "I couldn't look."

"Your sensitivity does you credit," the detective said. He ordered another round. Then he said, "Do you have your cellular phone with you?"

Babs took the instrument from her bag and handed it over. The detective found a number in his address book. He touched the buttons and waited. At last he said, "May I speak to the governor, please? Would you tell him this is Buckminster Fuller speaking."

"What are you doing?"

Fuller raised a hand for silence. "Mr. Governor? I know you're a busy man, but this is a matter of life and death." He listened. "Yes, I am. The famous man was my grandfather." Fuller went on to outline, in briefest terms, the story of Sid Scarney, who was due to be executed in a few days' time. He touched on the new evidence that pointed to the real killer. "So I'm asking you, sir," he concluded, "to order a stay of execution leading to a full pardon for Mr. Scarney."

The governor's voice, vibrant with respect, could be heard issuing from the telephone. "Pardons are rare. However, in this case, I don't see how I can refuse such a well-reasoned appeal from the grandson of the immortal Buckminster Fuller."

The detective gave Babs Scarney back her phone. He stood up, took money from his pocket, and dropped it on the table. "There's your sixty-dollar fee. Buy yourself another drink. You won't be getting any after they arrest you for murder."

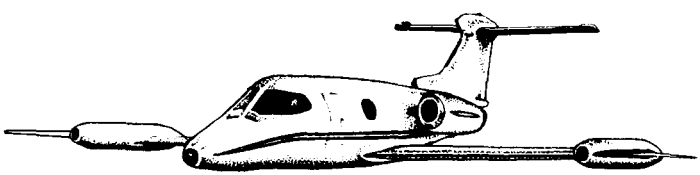
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Tell me something," Babs said. "Are you really the grandson of a famous man?"

"Aren't we all," the detective said. He moved away, with exuberance in his step.

"Where are you going?" Babs called after him.

"I'm off to Death City," Fuller said over his shoulder. "I can't wait to tell Sid Scarney he won't have to catch that plane."



DETECTIVERSE

A LIKELY YARN

by DIXIE J. WHITTED

Mrs. Horatia Green
Was slain by her knitting machine:
    She was cabled and purled
    Swiftly out of this world;
(Her husband had just left the scene . . .)

© *1993 by Dixie J. Whitted.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Like the narrator in her story, Suzanne Jones hails from a small town in the Texas flatlands; unlike her, she now resides near some very high places in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. . . .

FIND A HIGH PLACE

by SUZANNE JONES

In ancient Rome the way they used to put to death the people who deserved it was to take them up to the top of a cliff and throw them over. I think there's even a word for that, although I forget what it is. The punishment has such a rightness about it that we have incorporated the image into our language: We speak of proud people being cast down. Dynasties fall. As do scarlet women.

Still, as a practical matter, such a punishment wouldn't be suitable everywhere. Kansas City, for one, would have been a place ill-advised to adopt such a method. Our little town of Gilead in the low, rocky hills of North Texas would have been another.

Gilead had a population of about 7,500, counting pets, when my sister Claire and I grew up there under the mostly benevolent despotism of our widowed mother. It is where we have since chosen to live out our lives.

Lately my sister has come to stop by the library once or twice a week, and sometimes I close the door and go with her to a late lunch. Both of our marriages are childless, and now that Mother is dead, Claire says we are all the family we have and need to see each other. She still buys lunch. Despite the bottom dropping out of the oil market, her husband, Marvin Cronstadt, still seems to be far from broke. But they have given up their house in the River Oak section of Houston and retreated to their property at the lake, the "gateway" to which our town claims the exclusive right to be known as, even though it is a good eighteen miles of twisting blacktop to get out there.

Between my work at the library and my husband's selling sewing machine parts throughout the northern part of the state, we get by. But we lost our construction business in the oil bust, and James Ed

© *1993 by Suzanne Jones.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

has a little bit of a frightened look, even now when things aren't going too bad for us.

It was at lunch one day in April that my sister Claire said: "Didn't you hear me? I said Marv's trying to kill me!"

I nodded because I clearly was expected to do something. Claire was raising her voice and starting to attract some attention. Already I had seen Ginger Scuddy look up from her lunch, and that woman's mother is the biggest gossip in three counties. Ginger now pretended to study her salad, but I had seen her ears prick forward like a starving horse.

"Now, why do you say that?" I tried. "He loves you. He's your husband."

Claire lowered her voice if not her intensity. "He does not! He thinks I'm cheating on him—"

I pretended to think this over.

"Are you?"

Sometimes I couldn't help myself. Besides, I knew Claire had strayed from time to time, but I did think that, like the song says, she was mostly true in her fashion.

"What difference does that make?" she asked indignantly, eyeing Ginger. "It's not a killing offense."

Claire tossed her head and looked with unconscious cruelty at our reflections in the mirrored wall which flanked our table. I averted my eyes.

I never purposely looked in mirrors.

My lovely sister did, of course. She would smooth some imagined disarray in her silky hair, or touch the corner of her bright mouth tenderly, and thus reassured and strengthened, was better able to concentrate on the matter at hand. She turned her light brown eyes on me now, imploring my belief.

"Marv is a jerk," I finally acknowledged. "But murder seems to be going too far, even for him, especially if he only *thinks* you're cheating. What's he done to make you think he's after you? What are you telling me?"

"Who could I tell if not my sister?" Claire asked to the room at large, as though she were answering my question.

Ginger Scuddy and her mother, I thought darkly. This didn't seem the sort of discussion to be having in the only decent restaurant in Gilead.

Our exchange was typical of our conversations: asking the wrong questions. Answering questions not asked. Somehow information, if not understanding, usually was exchanged.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Claire put a long, pale, beautifully manicured hand on my wrist. My own hand lay passively, palm down, on the tablecloth. I kept my eyes on her hand until she removed it to rummage noisily in her handbag and produce her dainty, personalized lighter and her cigarettes.

"Oh, I know you hate the smoke, but this thing with Marv's made me so nervous it's smoke or scream."

She lit the cigarette and leaned forward to emphasize her next point. "He's bought *rat poison*. The girl at Rexall asked me if it had done the trick. You know, got rid of the rats!" Claire shot a narrowed look at Ginger, who might as well have been writing it all down. She sure was hanging on every word.

"So?" I tried to concentrate.

"We don't have any rats at the lake. Never have had—"

"Oh, come off it!" I decided things had gone far enough. We had indulged Ginger more than was necessary for entertainment value. "Marv'd never get away with poisoning you—"

Claire drew herself up. "I have a distant interest in his getting away with it!" She lowered her voice to a fierce whisper. "If I'm dead as a doornail I don't give a rat's ass if he gets away with it or not!"

"The point is," I said, trying to interject some sweet reason into the conversation, "Marv's not an idiot. He'd have to know he couldn't get away with it, so he wouldn't try—"

Claire tapped a blood-red nail on the table for emphasis. "Then you just tell me why he's out there buying rat poison when we don't have any rats."

I didn't know.

I tried a different tack. "Besides, poison is, it seems to me, well, tricky and uncertain. Complicated. Wouldn't it be simpler just to shoot you?" God knows it seemed to be a fairly common way of settling marital differences in our state.

"Oh, Marv hates guns," Claire said impatiently. "It's the least Texas thing about him. I suppose it was his growing up in New Jersey—just never had them around when he was a kid."

I was a little surprised. Not many Texas men in the mold Marv had cast for himself, which was loud, big, crude, and rich, were uncomfortable with guns. It was a macho, Texas thing. Even James Ed went dove hunting.

"Anyway," Claire continued, "Marv's clean stepped off the deep end. I think when crude went below eight dollars a barrel, that's what did him in. He's always been half crazy, now he's all crazy."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Claire was projecting as much sincerity as she was capable of.

I spread my hands helplessly, and paused to admire them. They were strong, capable hands. I wondered if I could get James Ed to buy me another ring for my birthday, which was coming up. I liked rings.

"I still don't know what you expect me to do about it," I said. She wasn't moving in with us, and that was that.

"Just come out with me while I pack up some of my things. Stay the night—I won't stay the night out there alone with him ever again. This morning he ran off both the cook and the yardboy."

I wondered if Marv was worse off financially than I thought.

"Then," she nodded as though she was thinking it through as she went, "I'll clear out tomorrow for Dallas and get me a lawyer and get started on dissolving the bonds that . . . "

I was skeptical of almost everything she had said except that Marv just might regard death as a suitable solution to his marital woes, if he had any. Especially if there was very little left in the Cronstadt coffers to divvy up. Such a solution certainly lay within Marv's character, or rather its lack. But even though he might be capable of murder, that didn't mean he was planning to murder my sister.

I looked across the table at Claire, who seemed for the moment to have lost interest in convincing me of her sincerity as she let her eyes wander about the room, pausing for a moment on each of the men within her view, sorting, classifying, evaluating. She knew most of them from childhood and had—so far as I knew—no interest in any of them. But she was ever practicing.

I suppose people still thought I envied her, people like Ginger and her mother, and I guess I do a little, but no longer for that skin that still glows as if a candle lights it from within. And never for the eyes, because they were the same as mine: fine, large eyes the color of caramels. James Ed was the only one who had seen into my eyes, beyond my acne-scarred mask, to who I was, who I really was, and liked me. I didn't envy Claire her looks anymore since I had married James Ed, who even Claire admitted was the best-looking thing this old town had ever seen. Claire, widowed too young to have garnered anything from the union except influential in-laws, married Marvin Cronstadt, pretty much over Mother's dead body. Being of one of the first families of Gilead as we were presented a high hurdle for any suitor, and the only qualification that Marvin could bring to Mother's restart of the marital sweepstakes for Claire was that he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was very rich. In the end, his gameness and Mother's poor health had lowered the fences, and rich had been enough to claim Claire. But like almost everyone else we knew, Marvin's wealth was based on oil.

If I envied Claire for anything now, I guess it was for the extremely high opinion she had always had of her own self-worth.

"Honest to God," Claire said abruptly, returning without warning to her theme, "I can't believe I tell you my husband is trying to kill me, and you just sit there as if I were commenting on the weather, or your old ancient history, or the price of oil. Don't you believe me?"

I thought that over. I don't think I did believe her, but even if I had, I shouldn't have been overmuch concerned. Claire was more than capable of taking care of herself. Her request for me to accompany her to the lake struck me as self-indulgent. Besides, I hate scenes.

My lack of concern didn't mean I didn't love her. I guess I did. Out of habit I always had, and I always would, for no very good reason that I could now think of except that when I was five and she was seven, and Jean Ann Baker had been making my life miserable all day, Claire had taken a croquet mallet and bashed her one. There were other incidents, I suppose. We were in our thirties now, so I suppose there must have been others.

I looked at the petulant expression on my sister's face. So pretty, even after all these years. I grow less ugly, I fancy, as I get older, but she seemed to grow no less pretty.

"Oh, say you'll come. Besides, isn't James Ed out of town somewhere, doing whatever he does?"

I nodded. My husband wouldn't be back until the middle of next week. Still, I hesitated. There was the dog. I hated leaving Claudius alone.

"Don't start about the dog," Claire warned. "You spoil that animal rotten, and it won't hurt him one bit to be by himself for one night only—"

"Won't Marv think it strange?" I asked to put her off Claudius, who was a noble dog but a bit clingy. "I mean for you to ask me to stay over? I don't want to butt in on one of your rows and then impose on him."

"I'm not telling him I'm leaving him, silly. Stupid I'm not. He can hear that from my lawyer. I told him I'd get a fourth, and we'd play some bridge. You know how he loves it. After the game it would be too late for you to drive back to town alone."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She paused to draw breath. "You and I can pack up my car before he gets up and both light out of there at the crack of dawn."

I felt a little prickle of irritation. Everything had been arranged. She had been certain I would come, certain that she could persuade me. I knew the all too familiar feeling of being manipulated.

But why shouldn't she be able to count on me?

I acquiesced. "What's family for?"

"You'll come then? What a relief!"

She settled back in her chair, basking in the glow of her success, completely satisfied. I smiled. Sometimes Claire was so clearly charmed by herself that it was difficult not to be a little charmed as well.

She had charm, all right, and some character. I thought Claire had handled the Cronstadts' financial reversals with grace, although lately she seemed subdued and, for her, uncommunicative, but then that is the way Claire usually deals with adversity, never really acknowledging the loss or defeat or setback, as if by ignoring it, she can avoid the consequences. I guess it works for her.

I suppose that's why I never heard her complain of the inconvenience of living at the lake, isolated like that. It takes her the better part of an hour of flat-out motoring in her Corvette to get in over that road that twists and churns like a headless rattler around the lake and through the foothills. Come she does, two or three times a week. I don't think it could be more often, since she would stop by. James Ed has been away a lot this spring, and I have been relatively free.

Claire and I don't talk much by telephone. We both have an aversion to long-distance calls, which I think might be a holdover from our growing up—as Mother would have put it—"in careful circumstances." Our family pride was in our breeding, not in our bank statement. Anyway, the service is lousy out there, and the phone is forever going out of order, which is a nuisance since her nearest neighbor is a good five miles away.

The fourth for bridge was Ben Dawkins, the less successful of the town's two doctors, a man mostly retired from active practice now who is a bold and innovative bidder, if a little weak in his card play. Ben's major asset as a player is his availability, since he too lives on the lake and is, in fact, the Cronstadts' nearest neighbor. He and his wife moved out to the lake less than a year ago. She died last spring, and Ben is just now starting to get out more. His bereave-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment seems to have made him quieter, which is appealing in a man of his years with natural garrulous tendencies.

Marv was also quieter than usual, although he had been cordial enough to me. I arrived after dinner, overnight case in hand, to find Ben already there and eager for the game to begin.

Claire was drinking a lot, as was usual when we played cards. Formal games bored her. She had her bottle of Southern Comfort which she kept for herself since no one else I know, or had ever known, could tolerate the stuff. Without Claire's support I don't know how that company would survive. Marv drank bourbon and branch water, and Ben and I drank beer.

The alcohol was starting to get to Marv I thought, that and coping with Claire in reduced circumstances. Although he really hadn't had that much to drink since we arrived, he was already starting to show the effects. He was as competitive as ever, as brutal to his partners for their errors, but the edge to his game was gone. He was getting sloppy. And every so often I would catch him staring at Claire with about as much expression as a side of beef, and I wondered if it were true, if he really did mean to kill her.

There was the incident over the cheese knife when Claire had seemed genuinely afraid of Marv, turning her eyes on me as if seeking corroboration. Ben smoothed things over, but we weren't enjoying ourselves much, so we called it an early evening—it was only a little past midnight when we stopped play. Claire and I saw Ben to his car, and the three of us stood there talking quietly in the moonlight about some of the hands.

The full moon had drained the color from the landscape and left it all in blacks and whites. Claire was jumpy and seemed reluctant to let Ben go. Even through the inner peace usually produced by four or five beers, I felt uneasy. Claire's fidgeting was wearing on me.

When we returned to the living room, Marv was facedown on the card table. Claire got him to his feet, but since he could hardly stand, both Claire and I had to help him into his own bedroom. Claire and Marv had always had separate bedrooms, even when lust was in its brightest bloom, because Marv was a world-class snorer. Something to do with his nose being smashed in a football scrimmage years ago.

He was snoring loudly when we left him there. Claire had limited her good Samaritanship to tossing a corner of the bedspread across his body.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How about a nightcap?" Claire said brightly.

I was tired. "I think I'll turn in," I said. "Losing at bridge is more taxing than I remembered it."

"Oh, what did you lose? Five bucks? Marv and I are the ones who made old Ben's evening. What did you have against bidding that slam anyway? Wouldn't six diamonds have a decent play?"

I answered her a little unwillingly as she turned me back into the living room, popped me a beer, and poured herself a drink from her bottle.

I didn't want to talk about the bridge hands, but I didn't want to be mean. I felt I should be more supportive of my sister. We are family.

We sat down on the couch and stretched our legs.

"He hates me," Claire said suddenly. "I'm afraid."

"Don't be so dramatic," I said crossly, wanting to keep her from starting up again. "You almost cut yourself with that knife—"

"That was silly," she admitted, "but it is sharp, you know, sharp and thin, not like a cheese knife at all. Here—" she thrust the handle at me. I took it gingerly. I didn't like knives. I set it back on the cheese board in front of us. "And Marv was the one who brought it out," she continued, "I didn't. I was lying down after dinner before you came. Marv was the one who set up the table and brought out the snacks.

"Oh," she pushed at the weight of her silky hair with a tired motion, "I know y'all thought I was crazy, but I really felt menaced when I saw him with that knife in his hand. Threatened. I felt for a moment he would just do it and damn the consequences. Do it in front of you and Ben or the governor of Texas. All the same to him."

She drank the amber liquid, holding the glass with both hands like a child.

I ran my finger around the rim of the cool, moist can of beer. I *was* tired. A little too much beer. Bad cards. My sister's flair for melodrama.

"Damn—this tastes funny," Claire said. She held the glass up to the light to inspect the quarter inch or so of liquid that remained. "You don't suppose . . . "

She let the glass drop and bounce to its side on the thick carpet. The remaining liquid splashed over the white rug. I remember wondering who would clean it up for her, since there were no more servants in the house.

"We left him alone in here . . . " Her eyes widened.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I stirred to refute her, alarmed at her recklessness.

She clutched at her throat. "Oh my God!"

I just stared at her. She was squeezing her throat and beginning to turn red. Her chest was heaving.

"Claire?" I tried to take her by the shoulders, but she pushed me away.

"I'm going to be sick! Help me, oh God. He's poisoned me. Get help!"

She was frightening me now. She was gagging and trying to throw up, retching, her shoulders heaving.

I backed into the hall.

This wasn't happening.

I found the telephone and tried to remember what to do in an emergency.

I couldn't. I couldn't remember. I felt like my brain was wrapped in damp cotton. I tried the operator, but nothing happened. The telephone was dead in my hand. I stared at it, trying not to hear the sounds my sister was making.

"Help me. Oh, please!" My sister's face was twisted in agony.

"I'll get someone," I said hurriedly. "Ben—I'll get Ben!"

It couldn't be happening. Not this way. Not to die like this, like an animal. I cursed my arrogance. I hadn't listened to her. I hadn't believed her. Now she was dying. The bastard had put something in the bottle when we had gone outside with Ben.

I drove numbly down the road, which looked as black as a river of blood in the moonlight. I missed Ben's driveway and had to back up, wasting even more time. I couldn't seem to get anything right.

"You must come!" I cried. "He's poisoned her."

Ben quickly found his bag and drove us back to the house.

Claire had fallen from the couch to the floor. She lay there twitching in her own vomit as Ben bent over her.

"Try the phone again," he said urgently. "We've got to get an ambulance out here."

"It's working now," I said gratefully. And it was. It seemed like a miracle to me. A sign. Something going right.

The ambulance came, and then the sheriff, because at some point in all the confusion of getting Claire on the stretcher, and the white coats, and the sticky, smelly intimations of mortality, Ben demanded to see Marv. Angrily he sent me to fetch him.

My own anger had a curiously calming effect on me. Marv wasn't going to get away with it. That's what I remember thinking. I would

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shake the bastard awake, and he would answer for what he'd done.

We were coming to the edge of the cliff—Marvin and I.

But when I let myself into the darkened room, I stopped, confused. Had we turned out the lights? I found the switch and looked into Marv's eyes. They were wide open and staring as if in disbelief at the handle of the knife we had earlier used to cut cheese. It was now protruding from his chest, standing upright in a field of red which continued slowly to spread, even as I watched.

But he was quite dead.

Claire wasn't quite.

Later they would find that there was rat poison in the Southern Comfort bottle and a potentially lethal dose in that glass that Claire had all but drained. They all would agree: Only Ben's quick and decisive action had saved her.

It wasn't clear who would save me.

"You are very attached to your sister, aren't you, ma'am?" the sheriff insisted in his slow-talking way. "I've known you and your family a long time, and I can understand your wanting to kill the man who had poisoned your only sister. You took the knife and went to his room and shoved it into his chest before he could get himself awake—"

"But I didn't," I protested, realizing how thin and ineffectual my denial sounded. "It must have been somebody else—"

"Who? You and your sister Claire were the only others in the house, or so you've told us. And your sister was in fits from the poison." He spread his hands sympathetically.

"It could have been somebody else. He had plenty of enemies—"

"Maybe so," he said doubtfully. "A man like Marv's bound to have his enemies. And they might have shown up on the same night he decided to kill his wife. We'll be looking into it. I hope you understand that these are questions I have to ask, ma'am. I always had the deepest respect for your mother."

But Marv's enemies' fingerprints weren't on the knife. When it occurred to me that mine were, I had Ben call Stanley Peavy for me. He had been Mother's lawyer, and I was pretty sure I was going to need him.

Eventually they let me go home to lie in my bed and will James Ed home to me. He had sounded so kind and good on the phone when I finally tracked him down at his motel room in Lubbock, just a little sleepy. He said he would start home right away. It was a four-hour drive.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ben had given me a shot to help me relax, and now I lay floating between the edges of things, not quite connected, trying to fathom or divine something that swam just beyond.

As I thought about the kind of man Marv was, it was fuzzily obvious to me that he had not poisoned his wife, however much he might want her dead. Beat her to death, perhaps. Stab her. Set fire to her. But not poison her. But if he didn't poison her, who did?

Poison. A woman's method.

I thought of Claire, lying in her own vomit. Would she really do that to herself?

I remember the sheriff taking Ben aside but not quite out of earshot and asking him if Claire could have gone in to Marv after I left for help, and Ben had been shocked and indignant.

"Not once the poison started to work," he said firmly. "It's too fast-acting. Claire went into convulsions almost immediately, her sister said."

Well, there it was. I was her goddamned alibi.

After I left she must have stopped her act, gotten up, killed Marv where he lay, reconnected the phone (although God knows the service is such it might really have been on the fritz), come back to the living room, poisoned the liquor, and drunk most of it down when she heard Ben and me come tearing up the driveway to save her.

I knew I was right with the pure, unshakeable conviction that comes in the early morning hours, but I also knew I was going to have great difficulty in convincing anybody of it. Once they knew my prints were on the knife, doubtless the sheriff would sniff around and eventually come to talk to the doctor in Wichita Falls who had treated me throughout my painful adolescence. Then everybody would be very kind to me.

I suppose killing the man who had tried to murder my sister might keep me from lethal injection. Mitigating circumstances might get me institutionalized for life instead. Somehow the thought wasn't very consoling.

Why me? What had I ever done to Claire to make her blame it on me? Surely she had other choices.

I cried myself to sleep that night for the first time since Papa died.

I went to the hospital early the next day before the town had shaken itself awake. That early Saturday morning, the only two people stirring on our street were me and the sheriff's deputy, who I suppose had been assigned to sit in a car across from our house. I waved at him, and he touched the brim of his hat and yawned as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he fired up the black and white. He was one of Jean Ann Baker's cousins.

Visiting hours were pretty much all the time in our little county hospital. What nurses I hadn't grown up with, I knew from Mother's last illness. I left the deputy getting himself a cup of coffee from one of the candy stripers while I went to see Claire.

I looked closely at my sister's ravaged face, but I could not read the expression in the depths of her fine eyes. The poison had muddied her skin, but it would clear in time and become smooth and lovely again. The room of course was private, and there were no flowers in it yet. But the flowers would come. All sorts of people would send flowers, I thought. Ginger and her mother. Mr. Peavy. Ben.

As I looked at her, I knew she would never speak of it, would never admit to them: Yes, it is true. All of it. It was I, I killed my husband. And I'll let them think my sister did it.

"Why?" I asked then. "Why me? I cared about you!" I could hear my sense of betrayal constricting my voice.

She smiled slightly, painfully. "You never cared."

Slowly she shook her head. Her words trembled in the air between us. Her eyes were luminous, glowing in her pale, injured face.

Hadn't I? I thought I had. Had she ever cared about me? In like measure, I thought. I suppose that somewhere in the depths of her soul, Claire loved me a little too through habit and association, as if inconvenience and irritability could be summed to make love. But not as much as she loved herself. Or as she would love, could love someone else perhaps.

That I couldn't believe. Passionately desire? Yes. Love? No. But her desire might make me expendable. Especially if it were more than Marv who stood in Claire's way.

I searched her face for some indication that what I was asserting in the silence between us was untrue.

She looked away from me at the blank white wall. Her breathing came more easily now.

"Marv was right, wasn't he? You were fooling around with someone, weren't you?" My voice rose in spite of my efforts to keep it level.

James Ed. The trips grown longer. The evasions. The silences.

I hooked my hands over the shiny stainless-steel railing of her bed. I stared at the white knuckles. Why wasn't the skin splitting, and the bones splintering through it, and my blood boiling all over the sheets?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I didn't scream. I am sure I didn't scream.

I think that I had never known loss until that moment. Not Mother, not even Papa. It swept over me like an awful, searing flame, vanquishing the dark places where hope still cowered, driving it shriveling from one refuge to another until it was altogether consumed.

"Crazy lady," Claire whispered almost sadly. "They'll never believe you."

Sometimes the edges of reality come bump up together. She was right. They wouldn't believe me. The sheriff. The courts. Even Mr. Peavy. It was just too complicated. They would take the simpler explanation from the sane sister. From the pretty sister.

James Ed. Such overwhelming loss. An abyss.

I looked down, faintly surprised to see that my whitened knuckles were still whole.

When I saw James Ed coming from far down the hospital corridor with his funny Texas walk, that slightly bowlegged, side-to-side shuffle men do who wear blue jeans and boots, I remember thinking how beautiful he still was with that little bit of hurt in his eyes that used to almost break my heart. He carried a bouquet of plastic-wrapped yellow roses. Claire's favorite.

I let him put his arms around me clumsily one last time and pat my shoulder.

"There now, hon, you've been crying. Don't cry. She's a tough one, your sister. She'll pull through. You'll see—"

I shook my head. "No," I said, "she's dead."

The tears in my eyes were real enough, but they were for me. Or maybe for James Ed and me, for us. Not for Claire, the pretty sister, who hadn't realized just how much I had cared, passionately cared. And how much, in spite of myself, I had envied her. And how strong my hands were.

As I said, there are no cliffs in Gilead. The water tower on the rocky hill we call Standpipe Mountain is just over eighty feet.

It will have to do.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IF MURDER IS YOUR CUP OF TEA...

YOURS FREE!
The New Bedside, Bathtub & Armchair Companion to Agatha Christie is yours to keep absolutely free simply for previewing Murder on the Orient Express.
AGATHA CHRISTIE
...THE AGATHA CHRISTIE MYSTERY COLLECTION WILL STIR YOUR IMAGINATION

Your introductory book

MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

Discover Agatha Christie's world of mystery, adventure and intrigue in one unique collection.

Agatha Christie's tales of mystery and suspense have become timeless classics - selling over 500 million copies worldwide. And now, for the first time ever, you can enjoy all of them in one unique hardback collection. THE AGATHA CHRISTIE MYSTERY COLLECTION–only from Bantam Doubleday Dell, one of the world's foremost publishers.

As a special preveiw to this unique collection, we're offering you the chance to preview **Murder on the Orient Express** risk-free for 15 days. What's more, simply for previewing it, we'll also send you **The New Bedside, Bathtub & Armchair Companion to Agatha Christie** (value$12.95), to keep absolutely free with our compliments.

Like all the books in this unprecedented collection, **Murder on the Orient Express** is a handsome hardcover volume, Smythe sewn and printed on the highest quality acid-free paper. Bound in Sussex-blue simulated leather with gold titling, it's sure to make an impressive addition to any home library.

You can examine it free for 15 days without risk or obligation. If you're not completely satisfied, just return it within that time and owe nothing. However, if you're like the millions of other readers who love Agatha Christie's thrilling tales of mystery and suspense, keep **Murder on the Orient Express** and pay only $12.95 plus postage and handling (and sales tax in N.Y. and Canada).

You will automatically receive further volumes about once a month on the same risk-free basis. No minimum purchase is required, and you may cancel your subscription at any time.

This unique collection is not available in bookstores but only through this special offer. So to ensure you don't miss out, mail the reply coupon today.

PREVIEW EACH BOOK FOR 15 DAYS FREE!

31203

❑ **YES**, please send me Murder on the Orient Express for a 15-day free- examination and enter my subscription to THE AGATHA CHRISTIE MYSTERY COLLECTION together with my free gift which is mine to keep whatever I decide. If I keep this first volume, I will pay just $12.95 plus postage and handling (and sales tax in N.Y. and Canada). About once a month, I will receive another Christie mystery on the same fully refundable 15-day, free-examination basis. I understand there is no minimum number of books to buy, and I may cancel my subscription at any time.

Name_____
(please print)
Address _____ Apt.#_____
City_____
State_____ Zip_____

MAIL TO: 073EL
THE AGATHA CHRISTIE MYSTERY COLLECTION
Bantam Books, P.O. Box 957, Hicksville, NY 11802-0957
Orders subject to approval. Prices subject to change.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jackie Walsh's second story, like her first ("The Lavender Garden," August, 1992), consists of only a few short scenes, yet in it she manages to convey unforgettably the motivation of her disturbed and criminal protagonist. . . .

PLAYLAND

by JACKIE WALSH

Melissa Cahill always remembered the road to Playland, no matter how far she traveled away from it. It was on Route 1, on the right-hand side of the road from Washington to Emporia, in a flat valley between two hills.

She had lived in Paris. She still had an apartment in San Francisco. She had been to Disneyland and had ridden painted and lacquered carousel horses on the merry-go-rounds of county and state fairs beyond counting. She even had a restored carousel horse in a corner of her living room, but she had never been to Playland.

Roughly estimating, Melissa guessed her father had driven her past it two hundred and forty-nine times without stopping.

Every other Sunday of her childhood, on the way back to her mother's house after spending the night at her father's apartment in Washington, the same thing happened. The minute her father had edged the old Chevy over the hill, she had seen the pennants snapping in a fresh spring wind. The trees around the park had always seemed to be naked, even in the height of summer. She had wondered what were the names of these pathetic, scrawny trees.

"Daddy, let's stop. I want to go to Playland."

Just as she had always said the same thing, his reply never varied. "Melissa." He paused, his hand on the seat between them. "You know who lives there, don't you? The thunder man lives there." He waited for the nightmare name to register. When it had, he contin-

© 1993 by Jackie Walsh.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ued, "Besides, it's a tourist trap. You're supposed to want to go."

Sometimes the name of her own particular demon was enough to make her turn away and pretend she hadn't seen the park. Other times, her belligerent side made itself known. "I want to go. I want to go to Playland, Daddy."

As she turned into a teenager and something like a rational, linear sense of the world began to unfold in her mind, she could see the park as two things at once: the wide, beckoning parking lot ("Free Parking!" signs for miles, every time Playland was hawked on a billboard) screaming primary colors on flags on top of freshly painted white posts, an entrance that looked like the house in "There was an old woman who lived in a shoe" . . . Another side of Melissa's mind let her see the place for what it was, a tired, out-of-date amusement park barely bigger than her mother's backyard. A depressing place, where weary ponies traveled tethered in the same circle, around and around again. And the trees never seemed to have any leaves.

Even then, between the two sides of her mind, there was a small, black space, and in it lived the question whether her father might be right, that the man—if it was a man—who had haunted her earliest nightmares, the man who made the thunder come, lived somewhere in the haunted corners of the park.

But still she had badgered her father to stop there, bothering him so much during one trip that he had pulled into the parking lot and gotten as far as the entrance gate when he had seen the admission prices posted. She had watched as his face had soured into a frown and he had turned, pulling her arm, forcing her back to the car. "Five bucks! Five lousy bucks! Are they out of their minds?" he had asked her, starting the engine, spraying gravel after them, and she had shrunk into the seat, closer to the door.

She had wondered what would have happened if she had flung the door open and run in through the gate. Could he have stopped her? Could he have brought her back? What would he have done? He would have had to pay for her then, and if he'd had to pay, he would have been forced to let her stay.

And perhaps she would have found the place where the bad man lived. Or perhaps her father would have left her to him.

Or maybe she would have just ridden the merry-go-round, then ridden one of the ponies, jabbing her patent-leather heels into the pony's flanks. She would have sailed on the Ferris wheel, up to the leafless tops of the trees, and below her would have been all of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Playland. Playland, the billboards said, a paradise for kiddies.

Locked out of Eden, she thought, as she swung the rental car into the empty parking lot. There was a chain across the park entrance—still the old woman's shoe house—and a sign that read, "Closed for the Season."

Chains didn't keep her out of anyplace anymore. She thought of herself as a free agent now, and she roamed places easily that no one would go without weapons and a promise of hazardous duty pay. She did it to prove to herself that it could be done, to prove there was nothing to fear.

She had stopped being afraid a year ago, and since then, she had stopped being afraid of anything and everything, even things of which she should have been wary.

It was a freedom that should have made her responsible, but instead, it had made her lawless. Even acknowledging the fact that she was now somehow outside the law should have cautioned her, but it didn't.

She stood at the chained entrance and heard a whispered voice from her past. *There are bad men there.* A quiet warning—no, a threat—to a child. *The thunder man is there. Be afraid, Missy.*

But she wasn't. All the nightmares from her childhood could have suddenly taken on a form, stood in front of her, and she would have felt nothing, not fear, not horror, not even relief that soon they would catch her and do what they had been threatening to do for years.

There were no bogeymen. No one made the thunder that had terrified her at night. And she knew that grownups must have realized what a threatening thing it would be to live in a world where there were no monsters.

She laughed as she imagined the out-of-work monsters, imagined them standing in an unemployment line, foul-odored, lost, abandoned, abashed bogeymen who had no place to hide anymore.

Her breath steamed behind her as she walked. Virginia in February was colder than she remembered.

She stepped over the Closed sign, ducking a little to fit into the shoe house. It was painted an odd color, a Campbell's bean-with-bacon-soup tan, a color her father had called baby-crap tan. The roof was brown and the plywood chimney had been painted a rusty red with wavering black lines to imitate brick.

She emerged on the other side of the gate and tried to see the park the way she had wanted to see it, with spring in full rush, with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the parking lot jammed, with little girls wearing dresses the colors of Easter eggs, with little boys in black pants, white shirts, clip-on bow ties, and their hair slicked down with Vitalis. She imagined them running full-tilt through the park, imagined their laughter and their squeals, the machinery-on-machinery sound of all the rides running at once. For less than a second, she succeeded.

For that one instant, everything was all right. The stone rolled off her chest, she was able to take a deep breath for the first time in a year, and she noticed the watery lemon yellow of the sun trying to break through the gray clouds.

It had been almost a year ago that her mother had telephoned her, telling her that her father had been placed in a nursing home outside Washington. He had been bothering the children in his old neighborhood, her mother said, but Melissa hadn't asked how or why.

It had been such a relief to visit him, to see him suddenly small and childlike, huddled in his thin pajamas in the one chair in his room, swaddled in cotton blankets. His eyes had registered nothing when he had seen her. And when she bundled him out a back door, to the waiting car in the alley, his eyes betrayed his panic, but she knew he had remembered his own rules: No yelling, not ever. Never a sound of protest.

The sun sank behind the clouds, her lungs closed, and the stone rolled back on.

"Damn," Melissa said. "Too bad." She turned back to look at the car. She waved and walked on, not expecting him to wave back.

The power in the park had been turned off, but she kicked open the bolt that clamped shut a utility shed, switched a breaker panel, and went over to the merry-go-round. A handful of levers started it, stopped it, sped it up. She found a speed she liked and hopped on a gilt-bridled black horse. She spun around and the cold air lifted her hair, numbed her cheeks, pinched her ears. She sat sidesaddle. She shouted, "Daddy, look at me," then jumped off and brought the ride to a standstill.

The game stands were closed, but she had never had much of a fascination for these. Games were tricks, really, set up so the grown-ups won or let you win. She had never liked games.

The ponies were gone. Her boots scraped the frozen red dirt as she described the circle their hooves had left.

There was a small roller coaster, little more than an elevated train, really, but the cars were locked and braked and not worth the bother of figuring out how to unlock them.

In the center of the park was the Ferris wheel. It was small, barely

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

twenty or thirty feet tall, not like the stories-high Ferris wheels she had ridden. The seats were barely big enough for an adult and a child. She stood next to the controls and moved a lever forward. The wheel trembled, then started slowly around. She pushed another lever forward and the wheel gathered speed. She wondered what it would be like to ride the Ferris wheel alone. She shivered as she imagined a thin cotton blanket around her shoulders, picked at by a relentless wind as the wheel whirled up and down. At its top speed, she counted a seat going past her every second, then slowed it and stopped it so a red chair was at the entrance gate.

She turned and looked into the woods beyond the park. In the distance, she thought she saw a shopping mall, a silhouette outlining a subdivision of new town houses. The setting sun blinked at her through the trees and she knew it was time to get started for her mother's house.

She never heard it anymore, the blank roaring white noise that had blared in her mind for almost thirty years. She had called it the thunder man noise, because she had heard it for the first time on the night her father had told her about him.

Her mother had put her on the train from Emporia to Washington on Saturday morning and her father had met her in D.C. at Union Station. He had taken her on a walk around The Mall that had encompassed the Smithsonian and the National Gallery. He had treated her to dinner at the Madison Hotel and had ordered Shirley Temples for her and told all the waiters she was his date.

Back in his new apartment, she had lain on the sofa, awake, terrified when the thunder began. Because this was where the thunder man lived, her father had said. In the closet in the hallway that led to the front door. He had told her this when he had kissed her good night, a nasty kiss that stank of alcohol, and he had gone to bed.

He must have known she was still awake. "Missy," he had called. "You awake?"

"Yes."

"Want to come get in bed with me?"

She said nothing, regretted admitting that she was awake. "I didn't tell you everything about the bad man." A taunting promise.

"You locked him up."

"Missy, he gets out."

She threw back the covers on the couch and ran to him. He opened his arms wide for her. "Mom wouldn't understand about the thunder man, would she?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Melissa didn't think she could tell her about him, but she didn't say this.

"I won't let him get you, Missy. Never."

She opened the passenger-side door, put her father's arm back in his lap, and picked him up. It surprised her that she was now so much taller than he, that age had made him light, light as a child. That age had made her so much stronger.

There was something in his eyes, something like fear, something like horror. Something that let her know he had seen what she had feared for so long.

"Oh, Dad, don't be scared. You'll like Playland. I promise."

Her mother sat in the rocking chair in the sun room, crocheting something fine, something delicate for a church bazaar. "Did you visit your father when you got into Washington?"

"Of course I did, Mom. I promised you I would."

Her mother put down her needlework and looked at her over the top of her bifocals. "Tell me how he's really doing, Melissa."

"Fine."

"Fine? I call the nursing home every week and—"

"He's doing a lot better. Honestly, Mom."

"How can he? Oh, Melissa."

Funny, but he had been right. She thought after all this time she would tell her mother, but instantly she decided against it. He was right. It would kill her mother to know. If she believed her.

"He took me to Playland."

"Playland! Melissa, how on earth—"

"He did. And he liked it, Mom. Especially the Ferris wheel. He liked it as much as I did. Maybe more. I think we'll have to do more things like that next time I visit."

The telephone rang and her mother neatly tucked her crochet work into the bag next to her. Melissa rocked placidly, and it occurred to her it had been a very long time since she had heard thunder.

Her mother spoke softly on the phone, then stood at the doorway between the kitchen and the sun room, gripping the wall for support. "Melissa," she said. "It's about your father."

No thunder, Melissa thought. No thunder ever again and Eden was always open. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELLERY QUEEN
THE WORLD'S LEADING
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

THE BUTLER DID IT?
STAY TUNED...SUBSCRIBE NOW
AND FIND OUT WHODUNIT!

Mail to:

ELLERY QUEEN
THE WORLD'S LEADING
MYSTERY MAGAZINE
P.O. Box 7052
Red Oak, IA 51591

❑ Please send me 18 issues of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE for only $28.97. I save 25% off the basic price.

❑ Please send me 12 issues for only $19.97. I save 22% off the basic price.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____

State_____ Zip_____

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of first issue. Outside U.S. and possessions $27.97 for 12 issues 18 issues for $39.97. All foreign orders must be paid in advance in U.S. currency.

We publish two double issues, in March and October.
Each double issue counts as two towards your subscription. HXSC-9

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

The legal profession has always provided more than its share of mystery writers. With the bestselling success of Scott Turow and John Grisham, lawyer novelists are especially in demand at the moment. Here are the latest efforts from a variety of them.

**** Warwick Downing: *A Lingering Doubt,* Pocket Books, $4.99. This is another original and expertly written book from a writer who always manages to find a fresh angle of approach. As in Colorado attorney Downing's last two books, a lawyer from the National Association of Special Prosecutors figures in the story, but smooth and politically ambitious Keane Williams is the antagonist rather than the hero as veteran defense lawyer Jack Bard describes his defense of gang member Drusus Church, charged in a Long Beach, California court with the murder of a crack dealer. All the major characters from judge to defendant are fully realized; the courtroom action sizzles; and the story is as unpredictable as it is absorbing.

*** Philip Friedman: *Inadmissible Evidence,* Fine, $23. New York lawyer Friedman's previous novel, *Reasonable Doubt* (1990), was a bestseller I found enjoyable but somewhat overrated. This one is vastly better, a 548-page behemoth that held my interest from beginning to end. Prosecutor Joe Estrada has the questionable honor of retrying Roberto Morales, a hero to Manhattan's Hispanic community, on rape-murder charges. Both he and the reader are led to have their doubts about Morales's guilt.

*** George V. Higgins: *Defending Billy Ryan,* Holt, $21.95. Boston lawyer Jerry Kennedy takes on the defense of an elderly public works commissioner accused of bribery and various corruption charges. As always, Higgins's writing is rambling, full of anecdotal tangents, not as dialogue-driven as it once was, but still not marked by a breathless pace. If summarized, the story would not amount to much. Still, the book is compellingly readable, its success is based on well-drawn people, a distinctive and eloquent style, and an insider's account of how things work in the interrelated worlds of law, crime, and politics.

** D. Kincaid: *The Lawyer's Tale,* $21. Kincaid, the pseudonym of Los Angeles attorney Bert Fields, is one of those writers I enjoy against my better judgment. The writing is generally bestseller schlock at its worst, marked by incessant name-dropping of Hollywood defender Harry Cain's pals. (Among the guest celebrities with speaking roles are Michael Ovitz, Mel Brooks, Anne Bancroft, and David Begelman, the latter a witness in one of the several court pro-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ceedings visited.) On the other hand, Cain's legal machinations are fascinating. Cain first appeared in *The Sunset Bomber* (1986).

*** Harold Mehling: *Assumption of Guilt,* Carroll & Graf, $21. An unlikely but successful recipe for a courtroom novel: take a regrettably familiar contemporary situation—alleged child molestation by a preschool teacher—and cast it like an old Frank Capra movie. Small town defense lawyer Harry Hull cries out to be played by the young Jimmy Stewart, and either Lionel Barrymore or Claude Rains could be quite effective as his malicious judicial nemesis. Mehling apparently is not a lawyer—and indeed he does much less plausible courtroom action than the writers considered above—but he has written an utterly enthralling story.

**** Ellis Peters: *The Holy Thief,* Mysterious, $17.95. In the first Brother Cadfael book, *A Morbid Taste for Bones* (1977), Prior Robert led a pilgrimage to acquire the bones of Saint Winifred for the abbey of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. In the years since, longtime readers have shared a secret with Cadfael about those miraculous relics. Now in the nineteenth novel about the medieval monk-detective, they disappear following a rainstorm. This is one of the best in a reliable series.

**** Lawrence Block: *A Walk Among the Tombstones,* Morrow, $17. Unlicensed New York private eye Matt Scudder is hired by a drug dealer to find the people who kidnapped his wife, collected the ransom, and returned her in pieces. Block, who won an Edgar for *A Dance at the Slaughterhouse* (1991), is one of the best living writers of crime fiction. He shares with Robert Campbell and Ed Gorman the ability to deal with the most unpleasant possible material and still radiate optimism for the human race.

*** Max Allan Collins: *Murder by the Numbers,* St. Martin's, $17.95. The fourth, and first in hardcover, of the series about Eliot Ness's post-Untouchables career as Cleveland's director of public safety concerns the numbers racket and the city's race relations. Besides the usual economical prose and swift narrative, Collins has a special nugget, spelled out in his afterword, for historians of the detective story.

*** Bill Pronzini and Jeffrey Wallman: *Day of the Moon,* Mystery Scene/Carroll & Graf, $3.95. Published in Britain in 1983 under the joint pseudonym William Jeffrey, this fast-paced and hard-edged collaboration of two formidable mystery-writing talents has never before been published in their native country. Flagg, detective/troubleshooter in the employ of a West Coast organized crime syndicate, tries to find out who has been hijacking his bosses' trucks. Though he was presumably intended as a series character, no more Flagg books have appeared.

*** Dev Stryker: *Deathright,* TOR, $21.95. Stryker is the joint pseudonym of a husband-and-wife writ-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing team who are expert at putting the fate of the world in the balance and making the pages fly. When her parents are murdered in their Caribbean home, book editor Amelia Pierce is thrust onto a roller-coaster of international intrigue for which her secret agent father had presciently prepared her throughout her childhood. It's wild, preposterous, and very hard to put aside.

*** Emma Lathen: *Right on the Money,* Simon and Schuster, $19. Another notable pair of collaborators (economist Mary Latsis and lawyer Martha Henissart) are in good and very typical form in their latest about banker-sleuth John Putnam Thatcher. Murder strikes at a kitchenware trade show with victim and suspects drawn from two companies talking merger. There's a funny chapter on a PBS funds appeal for which one of the companies provides volunteers. The puzzle is well worked out and so fair (indeed transparent when it's explained) some attentive readers will undoubtedly solve it. (No, I didn't.)

*** Nancy Pickard (based on characters and a story created by Virginia Rich): *The 27-Ingredient Chile con Carne Murder,* Delacorte, $18. To the more conventional collaborations considered above, add this welcome new culinary mystery about Rich's likeable sleuth Eugenia Potter, written by Pickard from the late author's notes. Eugenia is called back to her Arizona ranch by manager Ricardo Ortega, who has arranged a meeting of surrounding neighbors for reasons he does not reveal. When Ricardo and his granddaughter both disappear before the meeting can take place, Genia pursues the mystery along with a charming romance with a long-lost old flame. The trademark recipes appear on the endpapers but are fewer in number—not one for every character including the murderer, as was usual with Rich. (Tip for readers unfamiliar with either author: don't be discouraged by the slow and unpromising opening chapter.)

I admit to a bias against abridgements. I like to decide for myself if I'm going to skip parts of a book. Undoubtedly the print version of Martha Grimes's cunningly plotted theatrical mystery *The Dirty Duck* offers much depth and nuance sacrificed in the three-hour audiocassette version (Simon and Schuster Audioworks, $16), but the tape has the advantage of Tim Curry's remarkable reading. A mastery of both British and American accents is essential in rendering a story most memorable for the comic encounter in Stratford-on-Avon of gentleman sleuth Melrose Plant and an encyclopedic American Marlowe scholar. I also sampled the same publisher's simultaneously published six-hour abridgement of Friedman's *Inadmissible Evidence* (reviewed above; $20). Reader Dennis Boutsikaris does an expert job with the courtroom Q-and-A.

© 1993 by Jon L. Breen.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

BARBARA OWENS

Mystery stories featuring cats have enjoyed a vogue in recent years, a circumstance one review journal attributes to the fact that through increasing urbanization cats have become the pet of choice for many Americans. Readers in search of more cat tales should try one of the popular anthology series such as Cynthia Manson's Mystery Cats *or Martin Greenberg and Ed Gorman's* Cat Crimes. *But first, settle into your easy chair for Barbara Owens's clever addition to the genre. . . .*

WHO KILLED WEE WINKY?

by BARBARA OWENS

The contestants on *One in a Million* were being introduced as Mrs. Martin settled happily in front of her little black and white set with her breakfast tea and toast. The host, Rod Rooney, already had the studio audience in a fine mood. Mrs. Martin watched hopefully as Rod prepared to ask his first question. Would he do it today?

Yes. Just as the camera moved in for a closeup of his face, Rod looked directly at her and smiled. Mrs. Martin glowed, flushing warm all over.

"Did you see that, Wink? That was just for me. Today will be a good day."

The big orange tomcat stretched beside her on the sofa flicked an ear at the sound of his name but did not open his eyes. Mrs. Martin sighed, stroking him. She liked it when her day began so pleasantly.

Mrs. Martin had lived alone for a very long time. Sometimes she could scarcely remember Leonard and what life had been like when he was alive. It was just as well. Those earlier years held nothing but ugly memories—never enough money; an endless succession of cheap, dark, too-small apartments; and the smell. Oh, that smell.

© *1993 by Barbara Owens.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Leonard had hauled beer for a living. It had taken Mrs. Martin months after he was gone to get rid of the stink of beer in her home.

She had never stopped trying to convince Leonard to better himself, and she had devoted years to protecting Carol from the poverty and shame that he provided. And what good had it done? Carol ran away at seventeen to get married. Now she lived in California and in twenty years had never once invited her mother to visit. She rarely even wrote. No appreciation at all for the sacrifices her mother had made. Sometimes Mrs. Martin idly wondered if she'd recognize Carol today.

It was all Leonard's doing. Then he had taken sick at fifty and lingered three long years. She'd had to wait on him night and day, while his medicine and operations ate away at their pitiful savings. The savings went long before Leonard did. And he'd actually had the nerve to cry at the end and beg her to say just once that she loved him. Mrs. Martin had sniffed and turned away.

So she'd been reduced to living out her years in this dismal two-room apartment. In a big ugly building that squatted like a toad in a run-down Chicago neighborhood. She rarely went out except to market, and she had nothing to do with her trashy neighbors. They were always playing nasty tricks on her, although the various building managers never believed it. Her imagination, they said. Ha!

But she had forced herself to find small contentments. She lived on the meager benefits Leonard left her. She had her TV family who had become close friends. And, of course, she had Wee Winky. Such a tiny wink he'd been when she found him crying in an alley six years ago. Now he was the center of her life. Mrs. Martin had never loved anyone or anything the way she loved Wee Winky.

Twice during her morning TV shows he went to the back door asking to go out, but Mrs. Martin couldn't tear herself away from the set.

"In a little while, darling," she cooed to him. "We'll go out soon."

Right in the middle of a wonderful scene on *Let Us Live,* while Laura was at the hospital trying to find out if Michael had pulled through the operation, someone knocked at the front door. As usual, Mrs. Martin ignored it, but the knocking continued, accompanied by a persistent voice.

"Hey, Mrs. Martin, I know you're in there. It's Bob Singleton."

Annoyed, she rose and backed slowly to the door, keeping her eyes on poor anguished Laura until the last possible moment. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

building manager's narrow face with its silly walrus moustache looked at her through the crack in the door.

"Open up," he said. "You been complaining about a leaky faucet. Well, I'm here to take a look at it."

Pursing her lips distastefully, Mrs. Martin took the chain off the door. Just as Bob Singleton started through it an orange streak shot across the room and between his bowed legs, and before either of them could move, Winky was down the hall, around the corner, and out of sight.

Bob blinked after him. "What the hell was that?"

Mrs. Martin's hands flew to her face and she let out a little scream. "Winky! Oh, now see what you've done! Go after him! My Winky—Winky, come back here!"

Bob Singleton sighed. "All right, don't get all upset. I'll get him."

He lumbered away down the hall with Mrs. Martin pattering right behind him. At the landing she leaned over and called after him, "Don't you scare him! He's not used to strangers. Winky? Come back, sweetheart."

Bob appeared on the landing below. "Don't see him," he said.

"He has to be there!" Mrs. Martin insisted in a shrill voice. "I saw him go down the stairs!"

Bob shrugged. "Well, he can't get out of the building. I'll find him."

But an hour of searching produced no cat. Mrs. Martin, wringing her hands and calling frantically, finally demanded that they canvass the building. Bob reluctantly agreed.

Unaware that she still wore her bedroom slippers, Mrs. Martin stood at his shoulder while they went door-to-door. Some residents were out, some barely understood English, and some were not at all pleased at being disturbed. It was almost lunchtime when they reached a door on the sixth floor labeled Diaz. Bob Singleton shuffled in front of it.

"Listen, I know this lady works nights. She's probably sleeping. I'll come back to her later."

"Certainly not!" Mrs. Martin cried. "You don't understand! Winky's never been outside the apartment alone. We have to find him!"

The woman who finally answered the door was round and rumpled from sleep. When Bob finished his little explanation, she stared at him in disbelief. "A cat? You wake me up for a cat?" She seemed ready to unleash a torrent, but when she caught sight of Mrs. Mar-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tin's tearful face, her own softened. "Lady," she said, "I been asleep. I don't see your cat. I see him, I tell you, okay?" And she closed the door.

"That's the last apartment," Bob said.

"He's gone. My Winky's gone." Mrs. Martin clasped her hands prayerfully.

"Aw, he'll come back, especially when he gets hungry. Look, Mrs. Martin, I got to get back to work. Maybe that old cat's waiting for you downstairs right now."

But he wasn't, and after a few quiet sniffles, Mrs. Martin phoned the police. The officer who answered sounded surprised at first, but he was courteous, and he wrote down all the information she gave him, reading it back at her insistence.

After she hung up, Mrs. Martin filled Winky's little dish with fresh liver that Mr. Vitale chopped special for her every day and sat with it on the back walkway, calling to him, until it got too cold and dark to stay outside.

The tiny apartment seemed huge and empty. She cuddled Winky's pillow while she ate a bowl of soup and watched *Tuesday Night Theater* on TV. It was a sad story, and soon Mrs. Martin's tears mingled freely with the chicken noodle. At the end the poor wretched woman on the screen was left alone, sobbing pitifully into the fadeout, "No one cares. No one cares."

Mrs. Martin blew vigorously into a tissue. "You are so right, my dear. None of them—they don't care."

All through the long sleepless night she rocked in her rocking chair, holding Winky's pillow. She peered frequently through the frosted back door, but the liver in Winky's dish remained untouched, slowly turning dark and hard.

When the first rays of morning sun began to lighten the room, Mrs. Martin stirred in her chair and blinked red-rimmed eyes. "Well, he's dead," she announced sadly to the empty room. "My Winky's dead and no one cares. One of them caught and killed him just to spite me. I'm an old woman. What can I do?"

After breakfast she tidied up the room and called the police station. The officer told her no, he didn't have any word on a missing orange cat.

"Of course not!" Mrs. Martin snapped. "What do you care?"

Bob Singleton's sloppy wife said he was on the fourth floor fixing a jammed door and wouldn't have time today to go chasing after a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cat. Feeling like a thundercloud, Mrs. Martin sat down with a cup of tea to watch *One in a Million*.

The contestants were so silly and stupid today that poor Rod forgot to give her his special smile. Mrs. Martin's mind began to wander.

But it came back to her with a snap. "—one in a million!" Rod was shouting. Lights were flashing, horns trumpeting, and the music broke into the song it played when someone won the bank. A woman screamed off-camera, and Rod was grinning close up. "She did it! She did it!" Suddenly his eyes looked directly into Mrs. Martin's and he repeated with emphasis, *"Mrs. Diaz did it!"*

Mrs. Martin sat for several long minutes wrapped in cold white silence. Could she believe her ears? Rod had never spoken directly to her before. But he was her friend. Why would he lie?

"Mrs. Diaz?" Mrs. Martin whispered finally. "Killed my Winky? Why, Rod? Tell me why!"

She squinted desperately at the screen, but the show was proceeding normally and Rod would not look at her again.

Mrs. Martin stared briefly into her teacup, her mind ascramble. Finally she rose and left her apartment, creeping down the back stairs to her storage locker in the basement.

At 4:00 A.M. on the following morning, Doris Diaz finished her shift at the all-night market and drove the few short blocks home. It was cold, and she hurried up the back steps of her building, anxious for her soft, warm bed. The fifth-floor landing light was out, and as Doris rounded the corner in the dark, something rose up out of the shadows—a shapeless form wearing a man's heavy coat and a wide-brimmed hat pulled down over the ears.

Doris Diaz had lived on Chicago's west side all her life, and her mouth opened instinctively on a scream. But her foot slid off the edge of an icy step and she stumbled backward into the old wooden railing. A hand appeared from the shape to cover her gaping mouth, pushing the scream down her throat and adding just enough impetus to send her backward over the rail. She made a ripe, squashing sound when she hit the parking lot five stories below.

Later that morning, Mrs. Martin was washing her breakfast dishes when she heard voices in the hall outside her front door. Through her small spying crack she saw Bob Singleton with a big man in a police uniform.

Mrs. Martin widened the crack. "Are you here about my cat?"

The officer turned to look at her. "Ma'am?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He was very young. He had a big open face covered with freckles and his smile was pleasant. He looked very much like her beloved brother Dennis.

She opened the door still wider. "My cat, Winky. Have you found him? I think he's dead."

Before the officer could speak, Bob Singleton interrupted. "There's been a little accident here, Mrs. Martin."

She narrowed the crack. "What kind of accident?"

"You remember Mrs. Diaz on the sixth floor?"

Mrs. Martin nodded dumbly.

"Looks like she took a fall from one of the top floors," the nice young man spoke up. "Sorry to tell you, she's dead. I don't suppose you heard anything?"

"Oh my," Mrs. Martin said. "This awful old building isn't safe to live in. Do you think she'd been drinking? They all do."

The officer looked startled. "Well, I'm sorry we bothered you. Don't let it upset you." The two men turned to go.

"Wait!" Mrs. Martin said. "What is your name?"

"Officer Burdick, ma'am," he said, turning back.

"What about my cat?"

He looked thoughtful. "You've lost a cat, Mrs. Martin?"

"I thought you'd know. I made a report. His name is Wee Winky, a lovely orange tom. I'm so worried. He's never been out alone and he's all I have left in this world."

She managed an effective quaver in her voice, but her heart ached at having to pretend. She knew Wink was dead, and she knew who'd killed him, but the officer must never know that.

Officer Burdick smiled kindly. "Well, that's too bad. I'll sure keep an eye out for him." Again, he turned to go.

"Would you like to come in for a cup of tea?"

As soon as she said it, she was astounded at herself. No one but a succession of building managers had put a foot through her door in years. But this young man was very appealing.

"I'd like to, ma'am," he said. "But I'm on duty. I'm sorry." And he sounded like he was. "Good morning to you."

"You can't mistake Wee Winky," she called after him. "He has a white moustache right under his nose." Officer Burdick waved.

Mrs. Martin closed her door. "Well," she said. "Well, well, well." She settled on the sofa with Wink's pillow, smoothing it sadly while her old set warmed up.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rod Rooney avoided looking directly at her during his show today, but several times she caught him looking at her from the corner of his eye. Mrs. Martin nodded to show him that she had gotten his message and taken care of things.

As soon as *Let Us Live* began, it was obvious that Laura had received bad news. Her eyes shone with tears, and as the camera pulled away from her face, Mrs. Martin saw that she was sitting in the hospital waiting room with Michael's mother sobbing and clinging to her hand. Mrs. Martin's own eyes misted. "Oh no," she whispered. "Not Michael."

The camera panned to the hallway and the figure of a doctor walking slowly toward them. When Laura saw him, she sprang to her feet.

"There!" she cried, pointing to him. "He's responsible!" Her stricken face filled the screen. "He's the one!" Her streaming eyes looked directly into Mrs. Martin's. "The butcher! The butcher!!" The screen blanked out to a commercial.

Mrs. Martin felt faint. She rose on tottering legs and turned off the set. Confusion filled her aching head.

"Mr. Vitale?" she murmured incredulously. "But I thought— Rod said— Why would Mr. Vitale—"

Was that why Rod had avoided looking at her this morning? Had he made a mistake? Mrs. Martin's eyes widened. Or, worse yet, was he playing a trick on her?

"Mr. Vitale!" she said aloud. Then, "Oh dear. Poor Mrs. Diaz."

She was up early the following morning after another sleepless night. The day was gray and dreary; frost rimmed the kitchen window. Mrs. Martin dressed warmly in coat, hat, and gloves.

Mr. Vitale's butcher shop was only a short walk, but her nose was quite cold by the time she reached it. The shop was not open yet, but Mrs. Martin could see him at the slicer. She rapped smartly on the glass.

"Not open yet!" he shouted without looking up. Mrs. Martin tapped again. "Come back pretty soon!"

Mrs. Martin pressed her face against the glass. Mr. Vitale looked at her, cast his eyes to heaven, and came to open the door a slit.

"Mrs. Martin, I'm not open yet, you see that?"

Mrs. Martin smiled sweetly. "I'm so sorry, Mr. Vitale. I'm hungry for a nice little lamb chop for my supper. I had to be out anyway. I didn't think you'd mind if I slipped in."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Not ready yet," he grumbled, still blocking the door. "You come back."

Mrs. Martin placed her hand against the door as if to steady herself, pushing it against him. "Oh, it's so cold this morning. I feel quite weak."

Mr. Vitale sighed gustily. "Come in, Mrs. Martin, come in."

She followed close at his heels as he crossed the small shop. She had looked closely, but she'd seen no hint of guilt at what he'd done. He was an evil man. All the years of chopping liver special for Winky and now her poor darling could be hanging in his frozen storage room. She had to close her eyes at the thought.

"Today's lamb is still in the back," Mr. Vitale said. "I give you some from yesterday, special price."

"Oh no." Mrs. Martin shook her head. "Day-old lamb just won't do. I'll have the fresh, if you don't mind."

He minded. He pressed his lips together and rolled his eyes. "I'm a busy man today, Mrs. Martin, all alone. My son takes his wife to the doctor. Lamb from yesterday be fine if you cook it right." He repeated heavily, "Special price."

Mrs. Martin's chin began to quiver. "I've been your customer for years, Mr. Vitale. Have I ever asked for a favor before?"

With a final tragic look he turned and stalked into the meat locker at the rear of the shop. Mrs. Martin, right behind him, slammed the door, wrestling home the special burglar bolt that his son had insisted upon installing recently. Ignoring the sound of the panic buzzer and Mr. Vitale's pounding on the door, she tore a length of butcher paper from its roll and lettered it carefully in grease pencil: CLOSED. SICK TODAY. She taped it to the front door as she went out, taking care to be certain that the door locked behind her.

As she walked home she looked and called into every alley and alcove, just in case. Oh, Wink, I'm only a poor helpless old woman. What can I do?

Early the next morning someone knocked at the door.

"Sorry to bother you again, Mrs. Martin," Officer Burdick said through the crack she opened. "And I'm sorry, but it's not about your cat."

He looked surprised when she opened the door wide. "Good morning. Won't you come in for a cup of tea?"

The young policeman looked cold and tired. "I can't, ma'am. I'm here on police business."

"I see," Mrs. Martin murmured. "Still that Mrs. Diaz?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No, ma'am. I'm afraid we've had a murder. We're questioning everyone in the area."

Mrs. Martin gasped. "Murder! In the building? Why, they're all killing each other out there, aren't they?"

"No, ma'am. It's a Mr. Vitale. He owned the meat market down the street. Have you seen any suspicious characters in the neighborhood lately?"

Mrs. Martin managed to look shocked. "Why, I've known Mr. Vitale for years. Suspicious, you say? They all look suspicious to me. Was it a robbery?"

"Now, don't you worry," Officer Burdick reassured her. "We think it might have been a grudge killing. Someone locked Mr. Vitale in his freezer."

"Oh my. No one is safe anymore. It's very frightening, I can tell you, for an old woman alone like me."

The officer closed his notebook. "You just stay inside and keep your doors locked. You'll be all right."

"Are you sure you wouldn't like a cup of tea? It's so cold outside." She was getting much better at quavering. "I'm so lonely now without my Winky."

Officer Burdick's smile was gentle. "I'm sure you are. I'm watching out for him, like I said. I'll bet he turns up."

Mrs. Martin felt a surprising surge of real emotion. "You're a very nice young man. You remind me of my dear dead brother Dennis."

The freckled face blushed. "You know, I was just thinking you remind me of my grandma. You take care now." And he clumped off down the hall.

Mrs. Martin closed her door with satisfaction. "Well," she said with relish, "finally that is that."

Let Us Live featured Helen and Barney today instead of Laura. Their troubles continued with their wayward daughter, Liz. Afterwards, Mrs. Martin took a small bundle of washables to the basement laundry room. It was warm and deserted at this hour, so she stationed herself in a quiet corner to daydream about happier days with Winky. In a few minutes she heard steps outside in the hallway. Bob Singleton and another man. They went past the laundry-room door without seeing her and into the storage-locker room. She could hear their voices quite clearly.

"—wife said you was around the other day with that loony old woman looking for her cat. That what they pay you for nowadays?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bob's answer was muffled, the other man said something, then they both laughed loudly.

"How'd you guess?" Bob said. Then, in falsetto, "Okay, officer, I confess. I overdosed him on fleas. I know I'll get the chair."

More laughter, then the other man carried a box back past the door. Mrs. Martin didn't know him, just another one of the swarthy ones who had gradually taken over the building.

She sat very still, having trouble finding air to breathe. Of course. Bob Singleton. He had picked Winky up when he first followed him down the stairs—hidden him somewhere until they had finished searching the building. Mrs. Martin closed her tired eyes. Winky would have been afraid. He probably cried for her. Then Bob had killed him just to spite her. Rod and Laura must have been in on it, too. She shook her sad head. Mrs. Diaz and Mr. Vitale had died by mistake. It had been Bob Singleton all along, and he had pretended to help her, pretended to care.

She slipped stealthily into the storage room. Bob was kneeling with his back to her, working on one of the compartment locks.

"Mr. Singleton?" she said right at his ear.

He started violently, dropping the lock and cracking his head against the door. "Mrs. Martin! You scared the hell out of me!"

"I'm so sorry. I was just wondering if you'd heard anything about my Winky."

He didn't even have the grace to blush or look away. Instead, he rubbed his head gingerly. "Nope. Don't give up, though. I still think he'll show up."

"Well," she said, lowering her eyes demurely, "I've been meaning to thank you for helping me look for him. Would you like to come up for a cup of tea?"

She'd never noticed before what a mean little face he had. "Well, thanks," he said, "but I'm pretty busy. I ain't much of a tea drinker anyway."

"I can make coffee then," she offered earnestly. Again she lowered her eyes. "But maybe you'd rather not. You probably think I'm just a silly old woman." She produced a tear and wiped it away.

"Uh," Bob said. Mrs. Martin waited patiently. "Tell you what. Maybe I could stop by in the morning for a few minutes. Would ten o'clock be okay?"

"Oh yes, ten will be fine. Thank you." Mrs. Martin smiled to herself all the way upstairs.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Back in her kitchen, she climbed on a chair to search the high back shelf of her cupboard until she located the container of rat poison. It was almost full.

By 9:30 the next morning there were fresh homemade cookies and a pot of steaming coffee laid out on her little dining table. The empty poison container had been dropped discreetly down a neighbor's garbage chute. Mrs. Martin waited, sipping a cup of tea and humming a happy little tune.

When a knock came at her door she jumped, hands flying to her throat. Her heart gave a couple of sharp ugly slaps. Then two deep breaths and she was able to go to the door and open it, a smile forming prettily on her lips.

"Hi!" Officer Burdick said with a grin that stretched his freckles to their limit. "You'll never guess what I found."

Mrs. Martin faltered, her eyes moving from his big cheerful face down to the crook of his arm where he held—dirty, bedraggled, but unmistakably—"Winky!" Mrs. Martin cried. "Oh, it's—you've—little Winky!"

She reached out blindly. Burdick placed the cat gently into her arms and watched her fold it to her breast.

"Found him in an alley just a few blocks from here, white moustache and all. I brought him right over. He sure looks sorry, doesn't he?"

Tears fell helplessly. "Oh, I thought he was—how can I ever thank you—oh, my Winky's home and you—"

Burdick thought she looked like she was going to fall. He placed a strong hand on her elbow. "Sure looks like he could use something to eat."

"Oh yes, of course. I—a little warm milk—oh, Winky, I missed you, it's just been terrible—"

Officer Carl Burdick stood tall in the center of the tiny room, watching her fly around warming milk and crooning to the cat. Bless her old soul, she'd forgotten he was there.

A plate of cookies and a pot of hot coffee sat invitingly on a small table across the room. He eyed the spread thoughtfully. She'd been after him to come in and he'd kept turning her down. What the hell, a few minutes wouldn't make any difference. Poor thing was lonely. Made him feel good just watching her and the cat. He stepped up to the table, poured himself a cup of coffee, and selected two large cookies.

Yessir, it was worth it. After all the dirt he was forced to deal with on the streets out there, moments like this made it all worthwhile. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Nick Velvet story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

The most popular of Ed Hoch's characters, Nick Velvet is also the most outlandish. In this episode, it appears that honor among thieves extends to the subcontracting of burglaries, as the White Queen, a thief who attempts only impossible crimes, refers a job to Nick, whose specialty is lifting objects of no value. . . .

THE THEFT OF THE BALD MAN'S COMB

by EDWARD D. HOCH

It had been more than a year since Nick Velvet's last encounter with Sandra Paris, a thief whom some found more audacious than Nick himself. Using the name of the White Queen, and the Wonderland motto *Impossible things before breakfast,* she had carved a niche for herself in the world of bizarre crime. The rivalry between Sandra Paris and Nick had settled down to an amiable understanding, with a conscious effort to avoid each other's territory. Thus it was a bit of a surprise when she invited him to join her for breakfast at the Waffle House on Route 22.

"Good morning, Sandra," Nick greeted her, sliding into the red plastic booth. "You're looking as charming as ever."

She smiled in return. "A compliment, this early in the morning!"

"That's when you're at your best, isn't it? Before breakfast?" He glanced at the menu and then tossed it aside. "What've you been doing with yourself? I haven't seen any mention in the papers lately."

"In our profession we work best without publicity. You know that, Nick." They ordered breakfast from a pert waitress and over orange juice she continued, "I want to hire you for a job."

© *1993 by Edward D. Hoch.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That's a bit unusual, isn't it? After you called me in on that museum business—"

"This is different. A woman has approached me with a very good offer. I find I cannot fulfill the commission, yet I hate to turn down the money and admit to failure."

"Suppose you tell me the whole story, Sandra, from the beginning."

"This is in a southern state, back in the hills. You'll get the exact location if you agree to take on the assignment. The woman who contacted me hired me to steal a comb—"

"Something valuable?"

"No, just an ordinary pocket comb that a man carries around with him."

"Who is the man?"

"His name is Willie Franklin. He and his two brothers live in the remotest part of the hill country. He rarely ventures into town at all. Some say he operates a still and that's why he stays out of sight."

"Do they have illegal stills these days? It sounds like something from thirty or forty years ago."

"Whatever he's doing, he stays out of sight. He and his brothers are said to live in an abandoned water mill on the Casaqueek River. I drove down there last week, Nick." She leaned forward across the table, more lovely and intense than he'd ever seen her before. "That's a man's country. The women—well, maybe they're not barefoot and pregnant but they might as well be. As soon as I drove into town the word was all over the county. I went up to the mill to look around early one morning—"

"Before breakfast."

"Sure, before breakfast! All I got for my trouble was a couple of rifle shots that came so close I could feel the breeze. Back in town someone let the air out of my tires, and the next morning I found a dead dog in the backseat of my car. That was enough for me!"

"So you want to subcontract the job."

"I never thought I'd say this, Nick, but it takes a man. There's no way I could pull it off, even if I went down there wearing a beard and a peg leg."

"How much?"

"Your regular fee."

"How much are *you* getting, Sandra?"

She pressed her lips together. "Fifty," she said quietly.

"I'll take forty."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What? Your usual fee is only—"

"You need me, don't you?"

"I need you," she admitted. "Forty it is."

"Now tell me about the man with the comb. What's he look like?"

"Willie Franklin. He's the oldest of the brothers. All I saw was a group photo of the boys taken at their mother's seventieth birthday party last year. I have it here."

She passed Nick a color snapshot of three men in patterned shirts and jeans, squinting into the sun. The one in the middle was completely bald, with no facial hair. The one on the right wore a neatly trimmed moustache, while the other had a full beard that obscured much of his face. "The bearded one is the youngest," Sandra explained. "He's Jud Franklin, in his late twenties. On the right is Jessie. He's maybe thirty-five. Willie is in the middle."

"The bald one?" Nick asked incredulously.

Sandra Paris sighed. "That's right. I want you to steal a comb from a bald man."

Two days later Nick Velvet flew south to the Casaqueek Hills, renting a car at the airport for the final portion of the journey. He'd considered making the entire trip by car, but decided his New York license plates would attract too much attention in the southern hill country.

West Alum, the place he sought, was little more than a crossroads by the Casaqueek River, with a bar, a general store, a volunteer fire company, and a small church occupying the four corners. Nick assumed there'd been an East Alum at one time across the rickety wooden bridge, but there was no sign of it now. He parked in the cinder lot next to the bar and went inside. It was as good a place to start as any.

The bartender was a middle-aged man named André whom Nick suspected might have drifted up to West Alum from the Cajun country to the south. "Just passing through?" he asked, setting a glass and a bottle of beer in front of Nick.

"Looking for the Franklin family, actually. Drove over from the state capital to settle an insurance claim they've had outstanding."

"The old lady lives up the Post Road. Take the first right over the bridge. It's on the left, about a half-mile up the road."

"Are the sons up there too?"

"Sometimes. Mostly not. They're up in the hills somewhere. The old lady has a black handyman stays with her."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Mr. Franklin is deceased?"

"Died of cancer a long time ago."

Nick finished his beer and went back to the car. Down the road a bit he could see the sign for the motel where Sandra Paris had stayed. At the risk of getting a dead dog in his car too, he drove down and took a room for the night. Then he returned to the bridge and headed up to the Franklin place.

It proved to be a few acres on the side of a hill, with a tethered German shepherd that started growling as soon as he pulled up in front of the farmhouse. A short white-haired woman came to the door and called him off, then asked Nick, "What you want?"

"I'm looking for a . . . Willie Franklin," Nick told her, pretending to consult some papers from a briefcase he was carrying. "It's about an insurance claim."

"That's my son Willie. My oldest. Don't know anything about no insurance claim, though."

"Mrs. Franklin—"

"I'm Cassy. Everyone calls me Cassy." She smiled when she said it, and he could see the remnants of beauty there, even at the age of seventy-one.

"Well, Cassy, is your son at home?"

"Willie don't live here. He has a place over the hill with his brothers."

"Could you give me directions?"

"He's not friendly toward visitors. I never been there myself."

"He'll be friendly toward me. I have a check covering storm damage to his mill."

"Damage to the mill?" She frowned at that, trying to understand. "He never mentioned anything to me." A strand of white hair drifted over her face and she pushed it away.

"It was fairly minor. He probably didn't want to bother you. Is this mill on your property?"

"No, it's"—she waved her hand toward the crest of the hill—"over there someplace."

"You see, I need his signature before I can deliver the check. That's why I couldn't simply mail it."

"Maybe Gus can help you," she suggested, waving toward a tall black man who'd just appeared around the corner of the house. "Gus, this gentleman is looking for Willie. See if you can help him. I have to take Lucky inside."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gus's hair was almost as white as hers, though Nick judged his age to be no more than sixty. His skin was relatively light, but the hair, lips, and general features left no doubt as to his race. He appeared to have spent a lifetime working outdoors. "What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I'm Nicholas, from State Liability and Life Insurance. I have a check for Willie Franklin, but I need his signature. Could you show me the way to his place?"

"The boys don't like visitors."

"Oh, they'll like me!"

Gus thought about that. "They've been known to shoot at strangers."

"Not if you're along." He reached for his wallet. "Look, I'm so anxious to get this matter settled that it's worth ten bucks if you can take me up there."

He shrugged. "I'll take you. Leave the car here. The shortest way is up over the hill."

Nick locked the car and set off on foot with the tall black man, climbing up the hill to a point where they could gaze on the meandering route of the river through two counties. "It's quite a sight," Nick said.

"It's nice like this in the spring, with all the new growth on the trees."

"You've probably seen a lot of springs here."

Gus turned to him. "Been with Mr. and Mrs. Franklin most of my life. They only had the one child when I came."

"What happened to Mr. Franklin?"

"Died of cancer about fifteen years back. She's been alone since then. I do what I can, but the boys don't help much."

"She never had a daughter?"

The black man shook his head. "There was another son, Tom, but he took off when he was seventeen. Went out west somewhere, I hear."

"When was that?"

"Twelve years, maybe. He's between Jessie and Jud in age. Yeah, I've seen them all."

"But the boys don't come home much anymore."

"They like livin' up at the old mill. Willie and his mother don't get along, and none of them ever got married."

"It happens in the best of families."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They hiked a bit farther in silence, until another bend in the river became visible far below. "There it is," Gus said, pointing a bony finger. Nick could see a large building constructed of brown timbers, set at the edge of the water. The window frames were painted white and an unmoving mill wheel was orange. Though the building belonged to another era, some effort had been made to brighten it up. As they started down the hill through a stand of trees, Nick glimpsed a figure moving out the door of the mill. Almost at once they heard the crack of a rifle being fired.

Nick dropped to the ground but Gus merely laughed. "You're not used to country ways. If he was shootin' at us he'd have come a lot closer than that. It was just a warning because he don't know who we are."

He went out to the edge of the trees, shouting and waving his hands. Nick could see the bearded man with the rifle now—that would be Jud, the youngest—putting down his weapon and going back inside. If they weren't to be shot, they weren't exactly being greeted, either.

It took them another ten minutes to make their way down the steep hillside to the mill. Up close the building was more dilapidated than Nick had thought earlier. Even the bright paint around the windows was chipped and peeling.

Two of the brothers came out to greet them. Jud reclaimed the rifle he had leaned against the wall, but said nothing. The other, with a moustache and bright blue eyes like his mother, asked, "Who's this you've brought us, Gus?"

"He's an insurance man with a check for Willie. For damage to the mill."

The brothers exchanged puzzled looks. "There's no damage to the mill."

"Storm damage," Nick added quickly. "A claim was filed. Perhaps your mother filed it and doesn't remember. I'm Mr. Nicholas from State Liability and Life—"

"See if Willie knows about this," Jessie told his younger brother. Jud went off, taking the rifle with him.

Gus was shifting uneasily from one foot to the other. "I gotta get back to your mom," he told Jessie. "She'll wonder where I am."

Jessie turned his pale blue eyes toward Nick. "Can you find your way back, Mr. Nicholas?"

"I think so."

"Go ahead then, Gus. We'll see you around."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As the black man started doggedly up the hill, Jessie smiled. "Moves damn well for his age. Gettin' toward seventy, Gus is."

"He looks younger."

"Handsome man in his day. We always thought he was on the run from something, else why spend his life up here?"

"It's nice country," Nick observed. There was a slight odor in the air that he couldn't quite place. He wondered what an illegal still smelled like.

Jud came back then, still carrying the rifle. "He don't know anything about insurance, and there hasn't been any damage. He says it's a mistake."

Nick took the check from his briefcase. "Here it is, all signed and legal. Three hundred and fifty-four dollars in full payment of the claim. All I need is his signature."

Jessie reached out his hand. "I'll take that up to Willie and get him to sign for it. He can't leave his job right now."

"What's he doing that's so important?"

"Business. We all have our business, don't we?"

"I'm sorry, but the release has to be signed in my presence. I have to verify his signature."

They seemed to have reached an impasse. The brothers stepped inside the door and did some whispering. Finally the older one, Jessie, came out and said, "Follow me."

Nick entered the building, with the younger brother bringing up the rear. The main floor of the mill had been converted into reasonably comfortable living quarters, with a television set and a rack of rifles and shotguns for hunting. The windows overlooked the river, with a convenient kitchen and dining area at the other end of the big room. There was no indication of any female presence.

Jessie led the way up an open wooden stairway to the second floor. Nick could see doorways to separate bedrooms and a bath that occupied one side of the building. The other side was occupied by some sort of large storeroom, and Nick caught only a glimpse of it as Jessie opened the door. "Willie, you got a second?"

A beefy bald man came out to join them. He glanced at Nick with something close to contempt. "Why'd you bring him up here?"

"He has to see you sign for the check. He just wouldn't go away."

The big man grunted and extended his hand. "Willie Franklin. You got business with me?"

Nick shook hands and extended a business card. "A claim was filed for storm damage—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"There's no damage."

"Perhaps your mother filed it and forgot."

"This ain't her property."

"Look, I just need your signature and the money's yours. I want to be on my way."

Nick guessed the bald man to be around forty, though his size and baldness added years. He took the check and the release form and studied them carefully. Nick didn't believe in cheating people while he was robbing them. The check was drawn on an account that had exactly three hundred and fifty-four dollars in it.

"We'll have to ask Mom about it," Jessie suggested.

Willie Franklin's face broadened into a smile. "Hell, can't look a gift horse in the mouth, as they say. Who's got a pen?" Nick purposely refrained from offering his own, and Willie finally reached into his pocket. He was wearing an old pair of army fatigue pants with the deep patch pockets and his meaty hand came out like a claw machine holding a number of objects. Nick caught a quick glimpse of a small black pocket comb before it dropped back out of sight. Franklin held a cheap ballpoint, with which he carefully signed his name. "That satisfy you?"

"Fine, fine." Nick handed over the check. "I'll be on my way, then."

"Not so fast," Jud said. "How do we know he's not a cop, come to look over the place?"

Willie Franklin frowned. "Sheriff Garvey's got no reason to bug us."

"I'm just an insurance man," Nick tried to reassure them. "If you fellows are making a little home brew on the side, it's nothing to me."

They all laughed at that and Willie waved his hand. "Go on, get out. Don't try to come back, though. We keep watch day and night. Hate to mistake you for a deer."

As Nick clambered over the rough terrain on his way back to Cassy Franklin's house, he heard the crack of a shot and the snipping of branches far overhead. The bullet hadn't been meant to hit him. It was just the good old boys sending him on his way.

The first thing Nick did upon reaching his motel was to phone Sandra Paris back in New York. When her voice came on the line he said, "I'm having difficulties. Nothing serious, but it would help a great deal if I could speak with the woman who hired you."

"Why is that necessary?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I went over to the mill today. The experience was about as you described it. Those boys are fast with a gun, and I'd like to know how serious they are."

"I got the impression from my client that they're damned serious. That's why I backed off. You know it takes more than a gun to scare me off, Nick, but I guess I operate better in an urban atmosphere."

"Can you give me her number?"

"Not without her permission."

"Get it and call me back." He gave her the phone number of the motel.

In less than ten minutes she was on the line with the answer. "The woman's name is Dusty Wayne. She sings country and western songs at a bar over in Gunnerville. That's about twenty miles away. You can see her there tonight, any time after eight. I described you as an attractive older man." He could detect the trace of humor in her voice.

"Thanks," he said drily.

"Don't mention it. The name of the bar is Hardy's. It's right on the main road. You can't miss it."

"I'll be in touch," he promised.

That evening Nick found the town of Gunnerville without difficulty. Hardy's proved to be more of an old-fashioned roadhouse than a bar, with a large parking lot and flashing neon signs on all sides. The lot was about half full, which struck him as a fairly good crowd for a weeknight.

Inside there were little tables and a dance floor, but Nick ordered a beer and stood at the bar, listening to the sweet-voiced country singer who wore fringed buckskin and strummed her guitar like someone left over from the sixties. He sent a note to her via one of the waiters and presently she took a break, resting the guitar atop the stool she'd used while singing.

She came up to him and asked, "You're Nick Velvet?"

"That's right."

"I'm Dusty Wayne." Up close she was attractive in a tomboyish way, probably in her mid-thirties, with black bangs that reached almost to her eyelids. The buckskin pants fit with just the right degree of snugness.

"I enjoyed your songs. They reminded me of Loretta Lynn."

"Thank you." Dimples appeared as she gave him a slow smile. "Sandra said you were nice."

"How did you come to know her?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That goes way back to our school days. We were classmates at college for a year, but I dropped out and went on the road with my guitar."

"You know what I'm here for."

She glanced sideways at the bartender. "Let's get a table where we can talk privately." Nick followed her to one against the far wall. She sat down and lit a cigarette apologetically. "I was off these things until I heard about that damn comb."

"Tell me about it. Why is it so valuable to you?"

"I won't know if it's valuable at all till I see it. Back when I first started singing I fell in love with one of the Franklin boys—Tom Franklin. He was six years younger than me, just seventeen, but he was the best-looking of them all. Very dark, with curly black hair and eyes that could look into your soul. We were going to run off together and travel around the country singing country music. Then one day he just . . . disappeared. His brother Willie told me he ran away, went out west."

"What about the comb?"

"I'm getting to it. Tom was always fussing with his hair. I think he wanted to look like Elvis, but his hair was too curly for that. Anyway, I gave him a comb that he always carried, with his initials on it, T. F. He treated it like some sort of lucky charm. He never went anywhere without it, and he certainly wouldn't have gone out west without it. He might have left me, but he'd never leave that comb. A couple of months back someone from West Alum told me they ran into Willie Franklin at a pharmaceutical supply house over in Casper Hill and he had a comb in his pocket. He dropped it when he was getting out some money."

"That's true," Nick confirmed. "I saw it too."

"My friend thought it was funny for a bald man like Willie Franklin to need a comb, and I thought it was funny too." She took another drag on the cigarette. "Then I got to thinking about Tom one night, and about his comb. I never really believed that he just ran away twelve years ago, without even a word or a note to me."

"What do you think happened?"

Dusty Wayne took a deep breath. "I think his brother might have killed him and buried the body somewhere. There was always bad blood between them. I'll probably never be able to prove it now, but I just want to know. If he's carrying Tom's comb around, that'll be proof enough for me."

"You're paying a great deal of money to find out."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I've done well on a couple of CDs, and I've appeared in Nashville a few times. I'm married now, but sometimes I still dream of Tom Franklin and what happened to him. I want to know the truth. It's worth that much to find out."

"I'll do what I can," Nick promised.

The next morning Nick drove a few miles upriver from West Alum and rented a rowboat, speaking vaguely about doing some fishing. He went out in the gently flowing Casaqueek, getting the feel of the current, and finally rowed to shore about a mile up from the old mill. Approaching the place by night might be dangerous. He wasn't a woodsman but he'd read enough to know that the mere breaking of a twig could be fatal in the dark with an armed man nearby. An arrival by water should be safer.

He had some other tasks that day. First he found an almanac at the county library and checked out the time for the rising of the moon. Happily it was only in its first quarter and shouldn't give too much light. Then he went searching for a stray cat. He'd noticed a couple on the prowl around the town, and before too long he managed to entice one to him with some catnip purchased at the store near the library.

Just before midnight he set off in his rowboat with the cat in a convenient bag. He kept the boat toward shore, avoiding the more visible center of the river. Before long the mill came into sight, but he saw that there was still a light burning downstairs. He couldn't be sure if they left it on every night or if it was a sign that someone was still up and about. Nick grounded the rowboat in the shadows near the mill wheel and waited.

He was rewarded about fifteen minutes later when Jud Franklin strolled to the door and stared out at the night. He had a beer bottle in one hand and drained it as Nick watched. Then he closed the door and turned out the light. Presently a light went on in one of the upstairs bedrooms, stayed lit for about ten minutes, and then was extinguished. Nick waited another half-hour before he left the rowboat carrying his bagged cat.

He had no trouble with the door, entering silently and closing it behind him. Remembering the downstairs room as well as he could, he crossed to a table and picked up a lamp, then thought better of it and chose an empty beer bottle instead. He carried bottle and sack silently up the staircase to the second floor. "Now you come out, kitty," he whispered, leaning over the staircase to drop the cat onto

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a main-floor sofa some eight feet below. He followed it with the beer bottle, but this landed on the bare floor, shattering with a satisfying crash.

Nick ran quickly into the workroom where Willie had been and hid behind the door. Already he could hear the Franklin brothers shouting and jumping out of bed. "What was it?" one of them called out. "Get your gun!"

They ran to the top of the stairs and flipped a switch, lighting the main floor. Willie, his bald head gleaming, grabbed the rifle from his brother and led the way. As soon as they were all downstairs, Nick left his hiding place and hurried silently into the nearest bedroom. He was pretty certain it was the one from which Willie had emerged, and a sweep of his tiny flashlight across the nightstand next to the bed proved he was correct. There was the comb, along with coins, a pocket knife, and a handkerchief. He turned it over and saw the initials: T. F.

"A cat!" someone downstairs exploded. "It's a damned cat!"

"Jud, you were the last one up. Did you let a cat in?"

"There was no cat here when I went to bed," Jud insisted.

"Well, he's here now. Toss him outside or I'll put a bullet in him." Nick could recognize Willie's voice now, ordering his brothers about. He stayed in his hiding place, reasonably certain that if they decided on a search it wouldn't include the upper floor.

Presently the cat was exiled to the outer darkness and the brothers came upstairs to bed. "I still say I didn't let the damned cat in!" Jud insisted.

After a time they settled down, but Nick remained where he was for another thirty minutes. When he finally tiptoed across the floor to the stairs, something on the bottom of his sneakers made a scraping sound. He pried it off and dropped it in his pocket, but Jessie Franklin had heard something. "That you, Jud?"

From the next room Willie shouted, "Shut up, damn it! I'm trying to sleep."

"I think somebody's out there, Willie."

Nick heard the bed squeak and knew he had to hurry. He went down the stairs and out the door, just as the light went on. Slipping down the riverbank toward his hidden boat, he saw Willie outlined in the lighted doorway as Jud had been earlier. "He got away," Jessie said.

"It don't matter," Willie's voice spoke calmly. "I know who it was. He'll be dead by morning."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nick returned the rented boat in the morning and then phoned Sandra Paris. "How'd you make out?" she asked.

"You owe me forty."

"Good. I'll fly down and you can meet me at the airport in Atlanta. You'll get paid and I'll continue on my way to make delivery to Dusty."

"Sounds agreeable to me. Name the time."

"I'll check the flights. Call me back in two hours and I'll let you know. It'll be either late this evening or tomorrow morning."

Nick was just leaving the phone booth when a sheriff's car pulled up next to his. "Mr. Nicholas?" the deputy asked as he slipped out from behind the wheel.

Nick had a sinking feeling in his stomach. If they knew the name he was using, it meant they wanted him for something. "That's me."

"You were at the Franklin home day before yesterday?"

"That's right. I went there to settle a claim—"

"Come along with me, sir. The sheriff would like to speak with you."

"What about?"

"There's been a killing. Black man named Gus Adams who worked for Mrs. Franklin."

On the way to the sheriff's office, following the deputy's car, all Nick could think of was that Willie hadn't known who it was after all.

The sheriff was a small man who spoke in a soft voice and seemed completely out of place in West Alum and the Casaqueek Hills. His name was Garvey and his first statement was, "Mr. Nicholas, I find no record of the State Casualty and Life Insurance Company. Isn't that the name of your employer?"

"It is indeed. They sometimes do business under the names of subsidiaries."

The sheriff grunted. "Mrs. Franklin says you came to her place on Tuesday with a check for her son."

"That's correct."

"And Gus Adams took you to the mill where her three sons live."

"That's right. I only knew him as Gus."

"Too bad you didn't know him better. He was a fine man, much liked around these parts."

"He seemed friendly enough."

"Someone killed him this morning."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That's what your deputy said."

Sheriff Garvey leaned back in his chair. "Shot him with a rifle through the window of his cabin on the Franklin place. Killed him at the kitchen table. Any idea who could have done it, Mr. Nicholas?"

"None. What would I know about it?"

"A man like Gus don't make many enemies. Hell, he was almost seventy years old."

"Maybe he was killed accidentally by a hunter," Nick suggested.

"It's not hunting season. Did he say anything to you about any threats to his life?"

"He wouldn't be likely to talk to a stranger about it."

The sheriff played with a pencil and studied Nick carefully before speaking. "I think you'd better stay around here for a day or so till I can check on you."

"I'll certainly want to pay my respects to the Franklins before I leave." As Nick stood up another thought came to him. "When I was out at that old mill it looked like the Franklin boys were doing something illegal, maybe operating a still."

Sheriff Garvey chuckled. "That's Willie's idea of humor. I went out and took a look once, but there's no still. He's got a couple of old lab machines of some sort, but there's no moonshine in sight."

Nick hadn't noticed the humorous side of the bald man in their brief meeting, but he let that pass. "I'll be around if you want me," he said, trying to sound sincere.

There were several cars parked in front of the Franklin home when he paid a visit after lunch. Inside, Cassy Franklin was in a state of near collapse, being tended to by neighbors and friends. Her three sons were nowhere in evidence. "Mr. Nicholas," she said, recognizing him at once.

"I was still in the area when I heard about your tragedy," he said. "Gus was a real gentleman. I'm sorry his life ended in such a terrible way."

"He worked for me nearly forty years," she said. "Don't know what I'll do without him."

"When is the funeral?"

"Saturday. He'll be laid out tomorrow at the funeral parlor in town."

"I'll try to come by if I'm still in the area." That was the least he could do for the man who had died in his place.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He went back to the phone booth by the gas station that he'd used before. It was probably the only phone booth in the county. Back in New York, Sandra Paris was waiting for his call. "It's been more than two hours, Nick. Closer to three."

"I'm sorry, there's been a complication here. A man was killed and in a way I'm partly responsible. They thought he broke in and stole the comb."

"Why is that?"

"I don't know," Nick admitted. "But I should stay around till tomorrow, anyway, if only to keep the sheriff happy."

"Don't get arrested, Nick. I can't be springing you from jail again."

"I'll be careful."

"I'd better phone Dusty and tell her what's happened. Who was it got killed?"

"An old black man named Gus Adams who worked for Mrs. Franklin."

"You think the sons did it?"

"One son—Willie. Damned if I can prove it, though."

"Be careful," she said again as she hung up.

Nick left the booth again and headed for his car. This time, happily, there was no sheriff's car waiting. He put his hand in his jacket pocket, reaching for his keys, and felt a little piece of something. It was a flattened gelatin capsule of the sort used for medication. He remembered prying it from his sneaker in the dark the previous night. He remembered something else too. A friend of Dusty Wayne's had run into Willie Franklin at a pharmaceutical supply house.

Nick decided it was time he paid a return visit to Sheriff Garvey.

The sheriff needed some convincing. He listened to Nick's story and shook his head. "You may be right about Willie Franklin, Mr. Nicholas, but I need some evidence to arrest him."

"Then arrest his brothers. Bring them in and see if they'll talk."

"On what charges?"

Nick sighed, feeling frustrated by his attempt to work within the law. "Look, Sheriff, Willie may not have an illegal still up at that old mill, but he's got something illegal. Why else do they take shots at people who approach too closely. He's filling these capsules with an illegal substance, a drug of some kind."

"Prove it and I'll have them locked up within an hour."

"I'd prove it if I could get back inside that mill."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sheriff smiled at him. "Right this minute all three of the Franklin boys are at their mother's house."

Nick Velvet returned the smile. They understood each other.

The mill was quiet when he reached it a half-hour later. The door was even easier to open by daylight, and he wasted no time. He took samples of all the capsules he could find, along with loose powder that was in barrels labeled *flour*. When he left he went along the riverbank, careful not to encounter the brothers on their way back.

Sheriff Garvey studied the samples that Nick delivered to him late that afternoon. "The state police can analyze these for me overnight if I put a rush on it."

Nick smiled. "You don't like the Franklin boys any better than I do."

"Maybe even less, Mr. Nicholas."

Nick went back to his motel and found a visitor waiting in the parking lot. It was Dusty Wayne, sitting behind the wheel of her little sports car. "I'll bet you're looking for me," he said, leaning in the open window on the passenger side.

"Get in. We have to talk."

Nick slid in beside her. "You've talked to Sandra?"

She nodded. "That's why I'm here. Do you have the comb with you?"

He showed it to her. She took it, barely able to breathe, and turned it over in her hands. He saw a tear start to run down her cheek. "That's it?" he asked, knowing the answer.

"That's it. Tom's own brother killed him."

"But why? A man killing his brother—"

"It's been happening a long time, Mr. Velvet. Let me tell you about Cain and Abel sometime."

"He might have dropped the comb, or given it to Willie when he left."

"No. This was the first gift I ever gave him. He'd have kept it. He might have thrown it away at thirty-five, but not at seventeen."

"I have an appointment with the sheriff in the morning. Come there with me."

"Nobody listened to me before."

"I think they will now."

They were at the sheriff's office before nine. He shook hands with Dusty Wayne and pulled out a chair for her. "A pleasure to meet you, Miss Wayne. I like your music."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Thank you!" She gave him a broad but brief smile. "I wish we were meeting under more pleasant circumstances."

His gaze shifted to Nick. "You're a bit early, Mr. Nicholas. The state police haven't phoned in with the lab report yet."

"Can't you call them?"

"I suppose so," he agreed, reaching for the phone. After a few moments' wait he was connected to someone in the lab, and made several quick notes as they conversed. When he finally hung up he was smiling.

"An illegal drug of some sort," Nick guessed.

Sheriff Garvey shook his head. "No, it's quite legal. A common, though expensive, prescription heart medication."

"What?"

The sheriff smiled at Nick's surprise. "But it's been cut to fifty percent of its normal strength with flour—the flour from that barrel you sampled. Willie and his brothers are doctoring prescription drugs, repackaging them in their own capsules, and selling them at a big profit."

"Isn't that dangerous to the user?"

"Damn right it's dangerous! In some cases it could kill them."

"What are you going to do?"

"The state police want to move in today. We can't admit that you broke into the place to get the evidence, so they'll request a search warrant for an illegal still. We have to shut down their operation and discover whether they were selling the stuff in large lots or to individual pharmacies."

"Try to question Jud and Jessie separately," Dusty suggested. "Offer them a plea bargain if they tell you about the murders."

"Young lady, I don't need instructions from you." He narrowed his eyes. "What murders? Gus Adams and who else?"

"Their brother Tom. He disappeared twelve years ago. He was supposed to have run away but I never believed it."

As it turned out, Willie Franklin was not at the mill when the state police moved in. Jud and Jessie denied everything, but it was immediately obvious they weren't about to take the fall for Willie. By late afternoon they'd both signed statements implicating Willie in the shooting of Gus Adams.

Nick listened as Jud's confession was tape-recorded.

"Why did your brother want Gus dead?"

"He thought Gus had broken into the mill and stolen a comb."

"What comb?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It belonged to our brother Tom. Willie kept it, carried it with him all the time. Crazy thing to do."

"What happened to Tom?"

"Willie killed him a long time ago. Twelve years ago."

"Do you expect us to believe that?"

"I can show you where he buried the body. You'll find it in the riverbank just behind the mill wheel—what's left of it."

"Where's Willie now?"

"Gone to the pharmaceutical house for supplies. He'll be at the funeral parlor tonight."

Listening to the confession with Nick, Sheriff Garvey nodded. "We'll take him there," he said.

Nick phoned Sandra Paris and told her he'd delivered the comb to Dusty. "She's pleased. The local police are wrapping it up tonight."

"Good! I've made arrangements with her about the money. She'll pay me with a draft and I'll pay you."

"I only want my usual twenty-five. Give her back the rest."

"What's this—a charity case?"

"She was paying the money for love—love of a kid who's been dead twelve years."

"Suit yourself, Nick."

They drove to the funeral parlor just as it was opening for the evening. Gus Adams didn't have any family; Cassy Franklin was the closest thing to it. She stood by the open casket, greeting everyone who came to pay their respects. He knew she hadn't been told about the arrest of Jud and Jessie.

Willie Franklin was seated in a far corner of the room. He got up when he recognized Nick and started toward him. Then he got another surprise as Dusty Wayne entered, wearing a plain black dress.

"Hello, Willie," she said.

"What—? Dusty, is that you? It's been a long time." The top of his head was growing moist with sweat.

It was Sheriff Garvey who spoke the words. "Willie, I'm going to have to arrest you on suspicion of murder."

"Murder? What murder?"

"Two, actually. Gus Adams and your brother Tom."

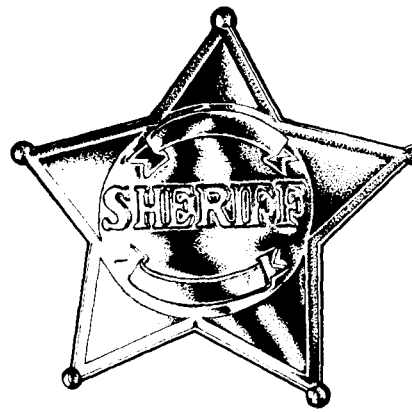
He tried to break through them then, heading for the door or perhaps just away from the casket behind him. The state police had him before he got more than a few feet, and his hands were quickly cuffed. Nick hoped his mother hadn't noticed the brief scuffle.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was Nick who said to him, as he was being led away, "Willie, we know about Gus, but why did you kill your brother?"

He stared at Nick as if seeing him for the first time. Perhaps he thought Nick was a state cop too, and was cursing his brothers for ever letting him into the mill.

But he turned and looked back at the black man in his coffin, and in that instant Nick remembered the descriptions he'd heard of Tom Franklin—the dark complexion, the curly black hair. "He was seventeen years old," Willie said quietly. "He was starting to look too much like his father."



CUSTOMER SERVICE OR SUBSCRIBER ASSISTANCE

Please direct all changes of address and subscription questions to: Ellery Queen, P.O. Box 5127, Harlan, IA 51593-5127.

For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send your current mailing label with new address.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Martin Werner is a retired advertising executive who spends much of his time now traveling. When he is at home in New York, however, mornings always find him at his typewriter working on short tales such as this for EQMM. . . .

CLASS REUNION

by MARTIN WERNER

So far it had been a good day for Darryl Crawford.

His wife had called to announce that their son had been accepted at Princeton. Later, he learned the Stearns case would be settled—in favor of his client. And old man Clavering had dropped into the office to whisper about a little surprise (read "big bonus") he had planned for Darryl at the end of the year.

Not bad, not bad. Now, at last, it looked as if life was looking up for Darryl. Not like six months ago when he had had that mild heart disturbance. Darryl never used the ugly word "attack," but that's exactly what it was. He knew, and the doctor knew, that it had been much more serious than the firm, or even Dorothy Crawford, had ever been told. Afterward, Darryl had been warned to slow down his pace, *really* slow down, otherwise . . . Well, he didn't want to continue that particular thought.

But all of that was yesterday, Darryl told himself. And this is today. A great day, as it was turning out. Happily, his secretary had taken care of the usual beginning-of-the-week mail. Nothing interesting, really. Then he noticed the unopened envelope with the word PERSONAL scrawled across the front. The postmark bore the name Madison, Illinois. Madison. Darryl's home town. A place he hadn't seen in thirty years.

Back in the fifties, there was nothing to distinguish it from dozens of similar places in states like Illinois, Indiana, or Ohio. But Madison had one unique feature: its prime location as a hub on some of the Midwest's biggest railroad lines. There was a lot of freight, even a stop for the north-south passenger trains that zoomed in and out of town on their way to Chicago or points south.

© *1993 by Martin Werner.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Darryl liked to tell himself that one day he too would be a passenger on one of those. Out of Madison and on his way to the top.

Lucky Darryl. After his high-school graduation, he did leave town. Not like he had planned. But he did go. And he never came back. Why should he? Both his parents had been dead for years. His sister had married and moved to California. And as for his brother, well, the last that was heard from him was a Christmas card in 1983. Darryl never answered it.

But this was no time for Madison memories. Rapidly, he slit open the envelope on his desk and drew out a folded piece of paper which read:

> Hi, Classmate!
>
> We're planning a real-l-l-y BIG high-school class reunion this year—trying to make it the best ever because it's our thirtieth.
>
> We hope you can join us. Please let us hear from you by the fifteenth of May.
>
> Class of 1963 Reunion Committee.

Over the years Darryl vaguely recalled similar invitations like this, but he always reacted the same way: a quick glance, a slight smile, into the wastebasket. It was different this time. A handwritten note had been attached to the invitation. "Dear Darryl," it read, "It's been so many years. Thirty! I do hope you'll be able to come to Madison this time around. I promise to let bygones be bygones. How about you? Love, Louise Braden." Out tumbled a blurry photograph. Darryl with Louise, both dressed for the senior prom, stiff, self-conscious, yet somehow strangely appealing.

He held it in his hand for a long time. Was that awkward-looking kid with the long hair really him? And was Louise really that pretty before the accident? Yes, of course she was. Thirty years ago . . .

Every year the senior prom was Madison's big social event. Preparations went on for months. And since Darryl would be in the graduating class the next day, he too had been carefully planning for the evening.

His date that night was Louise Braden, the prettiest girl in the senior class. ("Brains plus beauty," said the school yearbook.) What the yearbook did not mention was that Louise was the only child of the town's wealthiest family, and that one day she would inherit a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

great deal of money. Lucky indeed was the man who would marry her.

Like everyone else, Darryl knew this, and many times he invented a scenario in which he would carry the small-town princess away from Madison, and they would marry and live happily ever after in some glamorous place like New York or Washington.

But that was far off. Tonight he promised himself to be on his best behavior. As well he should. Even with his good looks, his grades, and a scholarship in his pocket, Darryl had a wild streak in him. He hung out with the wrong people. They smoked. They drank. No telling what they did on those secret weekends in St. Louis.

Nothing like that was going to happen tonight, Darryl told himself. No drinking, no grass, no fooling around. With the future spread before him, Louise would have a man she could be proud of.

Easily said. But for some reason, Darryl felt stiff and intimidated by Louise's prim perfection that evening. So when his best friend, Skip, suggested they should step outside for a minute, Darryl didn't hesitate. "Outside" meant a bottle of vodka that Skip had brought to the dance "just in case." And Darryl took full advantage of it.

The moment he returned, Louise's angry expression told him what a fool he had been. Too late. His romantic dream of wooing and winning the beautiful Louise Braden was over.

"Take me home," she said, "now."

No use arguing. The evening was over. When they reached the parking lot, he fumbled through his pockets for the car keys. "Move it," he said, as he rudely pushed her inside. He gunned the motor as they took off in a whirl of gravel.

That was the funny part, he remembered later. He wasn't driving fast, or even recklessly. But just beyond the school, the car had to cross a stretch of railroad track that ran through town. And that's when the car stalled, in the center of the tracks.

There were no warning lights. No signals. A train could be seen coming almost a mile away if you just paid attention. Except that Darryl didn't bother to look. He was bent over the wheel trying to get the damn motor started. Louise, on her side of the seat, had her eyes tightly closed to avoid looking at him. Then, before either of them knew it, the train was upon them, whistle blowing, brakes screeching. The sound of metal crumbling and glass shattering was horrible.

Darryl, luckily, was thrown clear and suffered only a few minor bruises. But poor Louise had been hit head-on. She didn't die. That

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was the lucky part. But after several painful operations all the doctors agreed she would never walk again. And her beauty had been destroyed. Somehow the dark red scars on her face never really went away.

There was an inquiry, but Darryl's drunkenness was hushed up. The case was ruled an accident and Louise's parents didn't profer charges. A few weeks later Darryl left for college—and never came back again.

But that was a long time ago. And time can heal a lot of things. Including poor, broken Louise Braden. After several years, she decided she had played the beautiful martyr long enough, and she began leaving her house again. She worked as a hospital volunteer and served tirelessly on all kinds of boards and committees. As the years went by, she became known for her good works and charities. A saint, said everyone.

Louise Braden's biggest charity was the annual high-school reunion. Thanks to her large cash contributions, she was always the person in charge, the one to see when problems arose. She remembered the names of every graduate and where to find them. And no one refused the invitations. Except Darryl Crawford. Until this year, when Louise enclosed her little note and the long-ago snapshot.

What the hell, he thought, thirty years. Everybody's forgotten and forgiven by now. He wrote his acceptance note. Local boy makes good. He chuckled.

"Why, it's Darryl Crawford! After all these years!"

"I'd recognize you anywhere, Darryl. New York sure hasn't changed *you*."

Darryl was basking in his newfound celebrity at the thirtieth reunion dance, the high point of the weekend. Why had he stayed away so long? he asked himself. No one even hinted at the past. Especially Louise. After the first awkward moments of seeing the thin, misshapen body in the little motorized wheelchair, they were talking like old friends. At first he blushed. "Louise, I—I never had a chance to tell you—about the accident. How sorry—about the way things turned out. Even after all this time . . . "

"Stop it, Darryl Crawford. Don't feel sorry for me. I stopped crying a long time ago."

"But I know what I did. And then not even writing, or calling."

"Please. It's over. You've come. We're friends again. Now open this bottle of champagne. I brought it just for the two of us."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

How simple, he thought. She's really forgiven me. The programed charm had worked again. No wonder he never lost a case in court. Still, the little tic around the eyes and mouth were signs that he still felt ill at ease in her company. And when he reached for the little brown bottle of pills he always carried he wondered why she looked at him so curiously.

"Heart," he said, almost apologetically.

"I thought so," she answered.

It was getting late and the party was breaking up. Darryl kept marveling to himself, I've never had a better time in my life. I should have done this years ago. Then he heard Louise asking, "Can I drive you back to your motel, Darryl?"

"What? I didn't know that you could . . . "

"Well, don't look so startled. I can drive, you know. A lot of us cripples do these days."

What was it? Darryl asked himself. It seemed she was amused at his reaction to her offer.

"Well, come on then." Louise's words sounded almost like an order as she led him to the parking lot.

"Here it is. This is my car." She said it proudly, like a little girl showing off her new doll. "Dad had it customized for me before he died. I can get in and out quite easily. And I can drive without any problem. A lot of cripples can."

That word again. Why did she keep harping on it? He buckled himself in, closed his eyes, and dozed. Too much champagne.

When he awoke the car had stopped. He couldn't make out where they were or how long they had been driving. All he knew was that he was alone and Louise was no longer next to him. He looked out the window into the darkness and could just make out that the car was standing quite still on some railroad tracks. "Hey! Louise!" he shouted, aroused at last.

"Something wrong, Darryl?"

Where was she? He wiped the steamy window and saw her seated, quite nonchalantly, in her wheelchair at the side of the road.

"What are you doing out there?" Darryl shouted through the closed window.

"Oh, just waiting. For the train."

Dazed from the drinks, Darryl didn't understand at first. Then the full, terrible significance of her answer dawned on him. Thrashing about, he saw that the automobile keys had been removed, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

windows tightly shut and locked, and the special door handles removed. He was her prisoner.

"Hey, Louise, this isn't funny anymore. Let me out." He stared at her in horror.

"Darryl, believe me, I didn't plan this. You actually helped me, you know."

"What are you talking about?"

"You actually helped me. When I found out about that heart of yours, I knew I wouldn't have to do a thing. Your heart . . . it's afraid, isn't it?"

"Yes," he shouted.

"You know, Darryl, I think it's going to stop very soon. About the time the Chicago express gets here. In about two minutes, I'd say."

She was right. His heart was beating wildly with fear. He fumbled desperately in his jacket for the bottle of pills he always carried. But of course Louise had thought of everything. She had taken them while he slept.

Two more minutes, she had said. He began pounding on the windows now, begging, screaming for mercy. She turned her wheelchair around so that she no longer had to face the car. There were a few last muffled pleas. And then, at last, Darryl was silent.

Which was really too bad. If only he had kept up with someone —even one person—in Madison. If he had he would have learned that the trains had stopped coming through town years ago. Madison wasn't even a whistle stop anymore. First the trains had gone. Then the buses and the trucks. The superhighway five miles away had taken care of that.

So Darryl Crawford died. Frightened to death.

How terrible, people said. A successful man comes "home" just once in thirty years, and then he has this fatal heart attack.

"I understand it happened in Louise Braden's car."

"Yes, poor thing. They say she tried to help him, but you know . . . in her condition . . . "

"Awful. They went together in high school, didn't they?"

"Oh, a long time ago. Back in nineteen sixty-three, I think."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Author of the Edgar-nominated Anna Peters mystery series, Janice Law now lives in Connecticut and has recently returned to graduate school in order to pursue a career in teaching. The literary quality of her fiction has earned her the recognition of Boston University, which is collecting her papers and manuscripts, but she has not forgotten her genre roots and continues to write as chilling a mystery as we could ask for. . . .

PIGSKILL

by JANICE LAW

Martin met her on holiday—a bad time, if you ask me, to meet a wife. He was in the south of France with gorgeous weather, perfect food, and no more than three words of French, when along came Diane. "I'm from Liverpool," she says, "Luv." That "Luv" should have warned him, but if it did, he closed his ears. Her much-processed hair was golden against the blue water, her bracelets jingled to the hopeful guitars and flutes of the boardwalk musicians. Even "Luv" was heaven; she spoke English.

It was the best holiday of Martin's life: long days on the beach, lazy dinners down the rail line in Cannes, then the trip back in the almost dark, the rail carriage still dim, unlit, Diane warm beside him, and through the glass, the red rocks of the cliffs diving straight into the sea and marking their entry with a whoosh of breakers. Such nights are like nectar, and Martin wasn't the first to try to bottle that charm for the cold New England winters. Not by a long shot.

Her package tour left from Marseilles, and he went into the city to see her off. "Goodbye, Luv," she said. Her mouth still tasted of the sea, her hair blew against his cheek. "Write," he said. Though she promised, it was not enough. There on Quai Cinq of the main Marseilles station, Martin Forbish did the first of the three very foolish things he was to do in life: he proposed.

Diane, charmingly, hesitated—calculated, he would later say, but one was as deceived as the other. He looked at her and saw pleasure,

© *1993 by Janice Law.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sunshine, bouillabaisse and strong white wine, and soft black nights behind the long shutters of their room. She saw a prosperous man who liked a good time and could be generous to the woman who amused him. He was a trifle older than she'd have liked and she'd have preferred him blond, but as the train pulled out she thought again. Liverpool meant rain, hard times, sore feet from the shop. At the next station she got off and hired a cab. In her haste, the luggage was left on the train and when she fell into Martin's surprised arms, her bridges had effectively been burned. They were married in Nice, which their friends thought romantic, and flew to the States.

At the start, things did not go too badly. Diane occupied herself with canvassing the house, with discovering all that was missing and that she could supply by trips to the mall. There was the novelty of company for him, and it was not until the rains of late October were followed by the bitter cold of November and December that the costs of their impulsiveness became clear. Put in simplest form, they were not the people they had supposed. Martin Forbish was not the generous *bon vivant* he had appeared on the French coast. Rather, he was an intensely cautious, fiscally conservative realtor who spent his days in the excitements of surveying an assortment of rural properties, and, when he was lucky, in the conveyance of wornout farms and scrub woodlot to investment-minded suburbanites.

As for Diane, I regret to say that she was what she seemed—only more so. At home, Martin noticed that she was vulgar, that her clothes were flashy, her makeup loud, her whole style a little cheap. She needed blue skies, white sun, the red rocks and pastel stuccos of Provence. She needed warmth. Undone by travel posters for Miami and Orlando, Diane had expected palms, pools, and heat; instead she found a trim but chilly New England village that was clogged with snow and ice for four months of the year. Before long she was bored—bored with the town, bored with Martin, bored with the shop—so much like the shop she'd left in Liverpool! What was she to do? The answer was as irritating as it was unsurprising: first it was George, who worked in the hardware shop next to her own ever so dreary billet at the drugstore. Then it was Peter, who, if no way better, was younger, then Alex, who was sweet, and Leonard who definitely was not. There were nights out for drinks and afternoons out at the motel along the county road.

Things went in this way from bad to worse. Martin took to having a bite of supper after work, and a few drinks, too, in order to get

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

home just in time to plant himself in front of the TV and watch the sport of the season. Diane, who had been reasonably circumspect, began to flaunt her affairs. She came in late, took days off work, left the house a shambles, and spent the food money on perms and fancy cosmetics. The Martin Forbishes began to quarrel, to curse fate, to regret the soft lights and madcap romance that had raised their hopes beyond reasonable fulfillment.

They could have called it quits, of course, but each had acquired a taste for romance. Diane didn't want to go back to Liverpool leaving behind her "American developer." And Martin, solid Rotarian that he was, did not like to admit that his fling abroad had ended in failure. They soldiered on, each hoping the other would disappear one morning like dirty dishes under a fairy godmother's wand, and each, quite unconsciously, made certain plans for how things might be without the other.

Like other unhappy couples, the Forbishes might have lived this way for years if it had not been for two incidents trivial enough in themselves. The first occurred in connection with Martin's work: a farmer out beyond Pomfret wanted to sell off some land, and Martin went to have a look at the property. It was a narrow strip of scrubby woodlot and low meadow fronting the state road, which was good, and backing up to a pig farm, which was not. Martin leaned on the wire fence, surveyed the churned-up earth where several dozen muddy-legged red pigs were rooting and snorting, and shook his head.

"Can't have bacon without hogs," the old farmer observed sagely. "Ain't no smell to good hogs."

"City people," Martin murmured apologetically.

"These hogs," said the farmer, "they're raised the way hogs are meant to be raised. Outdoors, see. Your pig's an intelligent animal. She gets bored indoors, gets bored, too, if you ask me, with all this processed feed. Slop's good for pigs, old bread, too. They like that. Cook it up myself for them couple times a week." He nodded to a small dark shack which Martin had failed to notice. Before it stood a line of troughs.

"Bread, you mean?"

The old farmer shook his head in irritation. "Bread they eat plain," he said scornfully. "Naw, I mean old turnips and cabbage, waste from the butcher. Cook it all up for them. I tell you I've eaten a lot worse than those hogs many a day." He spoke with a relish that Martin found disturbing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"They eat meat? Pigs aren't carnivorous."

The old farmer laughed. "Eat you, young fellow, right down to the gristle, and crunch your bones." He gave Martin a keen, unpleasant look, as if he could fancy a cutlet or a chop himself. See that gilt?" He pointed to a huge animal with a bristling of white around her snout. "That's Peg o' My Heart; she weighed over seven hundred and fifty pounds last time we had her on the scale. You can bet she enjoys a meal."

"They're not dangerous, are they?" Martin asked in alarm. His suburban clients were alarmed by large livestock.

"Naw, not if they're well fed and not molested. And clean. Now they're muddy at the moment, but this is a sweet-smelling animal. You can tell that to any client. If they build a house along here, why they'll hardly even know there's pigs around."

"Well, I'll see what I can do," Martin said, "but it won't be top dollar. You understand that. What with the low ground and the brush to be cleared and your agricultural endeavors—"

But the old farmer repeated everything he had said about the merits of his land, the cleanliness of his hogs, and the general level of profit that he considered reasonable before Martin got away, and the visit did not leave the junior partner of Raymer and Forbish in a happy mood. He'd be lucky if he sold that tract within a year, and the thought of the pigs and of their hearty yet somehow insinuating guardian made him shudder. Their round bulk balanced on dainty hooved feet, their small, cold, intelligent eyes, and their disgusting habits, so vigorously depicted by the farmer, touched the pit of his stomach. Perhaps that's why the argument he had that night with Diane turned ugly. They started to shout at each other, disregarding the neighbors. She called him a drunken pig and he called her a tramp before disappearing into the den, slamming the door, and turning on the television set. After that, all seemed as usual, but twice in the next week, Martin found himself checking details he had forgotten about the farmer's parcel of land and standing, nervous yet fascinated, watching the pigs. The second time, he brought three hamburgers from a roadside eatery. Though he could not have borne to examine his reasons, he was set to make an experiment.

One of the animals came over to the fence with the peculiar ambling trot of a fat pig, raised its long, sensitive snout, and sampled the air. Martin felt his stomach contract. The hog made a snuffling sound like the clearing of large, nasal passages and fixed its small round eyes on Martin hopefully.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Automatically, his hand opened one of the greasy paper sacks and produced a burger. A second pig came over and leaned against the fence so that the wire vibrated, making Martin nervous. "Here," he said and threw a piece of the burger on the ground. It was gone in an instant. He threw out another piece and then another, separating the meat from the bun, but it didn't matter, they wolfed it down like children on an outing and pressed their big bristly bodies against the wire and snorted and snuffled and demanded more.

"Get away you filthy things," Martin cried, and he kicked at the wire and slammed his fist against the fence post before he ran back to his car. Sitting sweating in the front seat, he had some inkling of the way events were going, and in a passion of fear, knew his danger, knew he had to escape. That night, when he was pounding some veal for dinner, Diane came in. She was in a good mood, and ordinarily, Martin would have postponed unpleasantness, but now he dared not.

"I want a divorce," he said. "I'll pay for your flight back to England."

"You what?" she said.

"We have to get a divorce."

"Well, you picked a fine time. Think you can just say come and then go, do you. What would you say if I told you I was pregnant?"

Martin didn't say anything. Instead he swung the solid steel meat tenderizer straight at her head. It caught her on the temple and she fell to the floor without a word.

For an instant, Martin stood in the middle of his kitchen. Then he dropped the implement with a clatter and bent over his wife. "This is why," he said stupidly. "It can't go on. I didn't mean to hurt you. Surely, you see now it was all a mistake." There were tears running down his face and he talked on for several minutes, explaining, cajoling, apologizing, before he realized she was dead.

He sat back on his heels in shock. He jumped up to call the doctor, an ambulance, the police, lifted the receiver, then let it drop. He ran into the bedroom, ripped a sheet off their bed and covered her up, then sat down at the kitchen table, lit one of his rare cigarettes and tried to stop shaking. He sat there for quite a while, incapable of thought, incapable, almost, of feeling, before he noticed the meat tenderizer and the veal—for two, obviously—waiting on the counter. The thought, stern and overmastering, came to him that everything must seem normal, that everything must be as always. With a feeling of intense relief, he jumped up, put the tenderizer in the dish-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

washer, threw the veal into a frying pan, and prepared dinner. When he had set the table for two as usual and fixed the vegetables and fried the veal, he could have wept with joy; everything was the same. And it would be. Everything would be all right, if he did not think, if he did not remember.

It was dark after dinner, and since the house had been built with an attached garage, there was no problem about putting Diane in the car. Martin loaded in the rest of what he figured he'd need, threw in, at the last moment, a change of clothes, and headed for the farm. A half-hour later, lights off, his car lurched onto the dirt track that ran between the property for sale and the field where the pigs were kept. Martin pulled well into the trees, turned off the motor, and reconnoitered. Then, satisfied, he laid his trouble light down on the floor of the swill shed and went back to the car.

He was in the shed all night, working hard with a kind of blank concentration. He was assisted in this oblivion by the physical difficulties of the operation: the swill kettles were large, cast-iron tubs, heavy and awkward. The fire burned coal or wood indifferently and required constant watching if it were not either to smoke and go out, or flare up with a vehemence that threatened the entire shed. By dawn, he was ready, and using a scoop he found in the shed, Martin Forbish began to transfer Diane's mortal remains to the troughs outside. When he was done, he changed, fed his soiled clothes and hers into the fire, and then waited out in the gray, dew-soaked pasture for the pigs.

The sun rose and he had a moment of sheer horror: they weren't coming; the old farmer had gone to modern methods, confined them to the barns, fed them up in the yard. But then, when he was soaked through with sweat and shivering uncontrollably, the first dark shape appeared on the brow of the hill. The heavy brood pig raised her snout, then trotted down toward the troughs. Martin made for the safety of the fence and stood there, his hands white on the post. He was sick in the trees after, but the old farmer had been absolutely correct: the herd of pigs cleaned the troughs till there were only a few large bones left. Sick with fear, Martin crossed the wire and retrieved these, the hogs watching with interest, accepting him as one of their providers. Martin put the last incriminating evidence down a chuck hole at the edge of the wood, got in his car, and drove away.

It was a couple of days before the store called about Diane, and a couple more before Martin felt obliged to call the police. The town

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was small, Diane's reputation was not entirely unknown, and by and large the police were sympathetic. "She'll turn up," said the officer. "Most missing persons do."

Martin agreed. It was not until almost six months later, when her family back in England began making noises, that the investigation started in earnest. Then there were questions, a polite but persistent young officer asked to look through Diane's belongings, and gradually, ever so gradually, Martin felt the scales tip as sympathy slid into suspicion.

With that transition, the fantasy of normalcy that had sustained him through the ghastly scenes in the swill shed began to come apart. He was impelled to think over what he had done, not from any guilty conscience—necessity, for Martin, as for so many others, excused all—but for fear he had made some mistake, left some clue, neglected some essential. He wondered now if he should have discarded some of her clothes along with the cosmetics which he had prudently thrown into the trash, and whether he should not have packed a case and taken it to Boston, perhaps, or checked it in New York, or bought an air ticket, or done any one of a thousand things to throw the quiet, but by now omnipresent, young detective off his trail. Worst of all, he began to wonder if there was not perhaps something left in the shed or in one of the troughs.

This thought haunted him. The young detective was forever "checking on his movements" as he called it, and it seemed very likely that he would one day visit the old pig farmer, hear about the wholesome old-fashioned diet of these particular hogs and— But Martin could never go further than that. The very thought was unbearable, suggesting, as it did, that he really had done what he had. So, one afternoon late in the year, Martin did his last foolish thing: he got into his car, taking with him his clipboard and notebook as if he were going to work, and drove to the farm. He had to have a look round. He had to know.

It was colder out in the country; the ruts in the fields were filled up with ice, and the only color in the brown and white landscape was the thin band of rose and gold where the sun, lethargic all day, was dying in splendor, its blood staining the trunks of the trees and the plain unpainted boards of the shed. Martin's mouth went dry, and he delayed, leaning against the wire, sick at heart and unwilling to go on. Then the blue shadows of the dusk appeared, and, sure the pigs would have been driven back to the barnyard, he climbed the wire and crossed the frozen clods of earth to the troughs. They

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were dry, empty. A fragment of a cabbage leaf stuck fast in one, another had a little long-frozen slop. He went into the shed, lit matches to see into the depths of the kettles, poked in the ashes of the fire: nothing.

Rather than reassuring him, this absence filled Martin with panic. Not so much as a button: they'd been there before him. Even now that smooth and quiet detective would be laying out his evidence, putting buttons and zippers and bones in little plastic envelopes. With a shudder, Martin went back outside. He walked around the troughs, peering underneath, nothing. Chilled with sweat, he got down on his hands and knees and felt beneath each trough, then all along the ground between them. He clawed at the frozen clods of earth until his fingers ached, and then crept back again, patting the cold, ice-slicked sides of the trough: it had to be there somewhere, it had to be.

Deep in his search, he did not hear them until they were pressed close around him, long snouts twitching, small, cold, intelligent eyes watching him with hopeful curiosity. Martin raised his head and saw that they were close enough to touch, their large, warm, bristly bodies a solid wall, their evil little hooved feet pawing the ground in hungry eagerness, their eyes filled now with a passionate interest, their narrow jaws open to show the stubby, yellowed teeth.

"No," said Martin with a gasp, "get away." He flung his arm out at them, but the pigs were unconcerned, they pressed closer, eager to be fed. "No," cried Martin, as his chest turned to ice. He clutched the side of the trough and tried to pull himself upright, but his breath failed him. "Please, no," he said, but, impatient now, one of the hogs poked him with its moist snout. Martin swung his arm, mad with horror at them, at their eyes, at what they could do, at what he had done, and in this last effort, his heart, long burdened by its secret, burst.

Martin fell with a cough and a sigh onto the frozen ground. The pigs were puzzled, disappointed. They snuffled at their empty troughs, and, spoiled as they were, it was a full day before they decided that Martin as he was would just have to do.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

DONALD OLSON

For months at a time, EQMM *hears not a word from Jamestown, New York author Donald Olson, but then a packet of seven or eight stories will arrive in our mailroom at once, the product of all those long weeks. As new stories are being written, the old ones are cooling on the workbench, giving the author the perspective of time, a chance to view his work critically before sending it on. Perhaps that is why the quality of what we receive from him is so high, and why the arrival of those particular bundles brings us so much pleasure. . . .*

LAST BUS TO MANCHESTER

by DONALD OLSON

From the tennis court to Fancher Hall Jordan Archer kept lashing out with his racket as if still flogging the invisible demon of anxiety that had driven him to serve a seemingly endless series of double faults.

Odell made as if to snatch the racket away from his friend. "Jordy, will you stop flailing that thing around and just tell me what's eating you?"

"Don't even ask, man."

"It's what's-her-face, right?"

"Debra. The name is Debra."

"So are you going to tell me what happened last night?"

"Nothing *happened.*"

"And that's why you're uptight?" Odell was a big blond youth with blue, oxlike, unexcitable eyes, the exact opposite in both looks and

© *1993 by Donald Olson.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

temperament of his companion, who was supple as a cat, dark as a gypsy, with a burning intensity in his deep-set, intelligent green eyes.

"I don't want to talk about it," Jordan said. "You can't help. No one can help."

The quiet violence of his tone struck a discordant note on the tranquil air of the all-but-deserted campus of Burnmill, a modestly endowed but socially impeccable prep school indistinguishable from a dozen others throughout New England. It appeared at its best on this June day when all but a handful of students had departed for the summer vacation. White-columned red-brick buildings formed a pleasing contrast to the still spring-fresh greenness of sweeping lawns and age-old sugar maples, through the branches of which, at the foot of the hill, could be glimpsed the tadpole-colored river winding lazily toward the sea.

"I wish you'd change your mind about coming home with me," said Odell. "Summer on the Cape? Parties, sailing, *girls?*"

"Don't tempt me."

To run away, if only to the Cape, and from there to parts unknown, had seemed the only answer last night as Jordan had huddled, wet and shivering and sick at heart, on the riverbank. By then white-hot anger had subsided into black despair, while in the creepy late-night stillness he'd fancied he could still hear the girl's frantic cries as she'd struggled in the water making those horrible gasping noises.

They'd reached the dorm when a thought, lurking at the back of his mind, perhaps since last night, suddenly crystallized into decision. "I'm not going anywhere, Skip, until I've talked to Mr. Chiverton."

Odell uttered a snort of disbelief. "You must be on drugs, pal. Talk to me. Talk to the man in the moon. But don't talk to one of *them.*"

"He's not one of them."

"Since when is a faculty member not one of them?"

"You know what I mean," said Jordan. "He's different. He listens."

"Well, listen to me. You talk to him and you're out, man. You're expelled. All that airy-fairy talk of his in class about truth and beauty and honor and duty. It'll be *his* duty to blab to the Head."

"I don't think he would," said Jordan with more conviction than he felt. He knew that Odell would be even more against the idea if he knew what had happened last night.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Now the blond boy's laugh betrayed a fine edge of cruelty. "So you worship the guy. So you think he has all the wisdom of Socrates—"

"Solomon."

"Whoever. To the rest of us he's a chump. A spineless wimp. Maybe he doesn't know it with his head up there in the clouds but that hot-pants wife of his has made him a laughingstock all over campus."

Jordan rushed to the man's defense. "Filthy gossip, that's all it is."

"Don't be dumb. All those weekly trips of hers to Manchester? You know where she 'goes to Manchester,' don't you? In the caretaker's cottage! They shack up there once a week."

"Bull!"

"Fielding saw them, man. Twice."

"Fielding's a liar."

"Like hell he is. How can you respect a guy who lets his wife two-time him with an illiterate slob like Garvey?"

Jordan adopted a tone of steely indifference. "I might not respect her—if it's true—but it wouldn't change my opinion of him."

"It's become a joke. Every time one of the guys goes into Clovenford for a little fun he says he's 'going to Manchester.' Everyone knows what it means."

"Then they're all jerks. I'm still going to talk to him."

Odell turned away. "Your funeral, buddy."

Jordan arrived at the small red-brick house just off campus in time to see a van with the words CLOVENFORD NURSERY on its door driving away. Chiverton, a short, sparely built man in his late forties with graying, cowlicky hair and very clear, searching blue eyes, stood on the gravel drive regarding with apparent dismay a young tree with its roots balled in burlap propped against the garden wall.

"Is it a bad time, sir?" Jordan asked. "I can come back later if you're busy. I was hoping you could spare me a few minutes."

"My boy, you couldn't have come at a better time. It's too hot for gardening. When my wife said she'd ordered a catalpa from the nursery I assumed, in my botanical ignorance, that she was talking about a flowering shrub, not some bloody great *tree.*"

"I'll be glad to help you with it, sir," said Jordan eagerly, the urge to confide already weakening. "Where does it go?"

"There by the wall where I've dug out the rosebed. Luana's decided roses require too much attention. Trees just grow. I'll leave it till

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tomorrow. Right now I'd like a beer. Come inside and tell me what's on your mind."

Chiverton misread the uncertainty in Jordan's glance. "It's okay. I'm quite alone. My wife just caught the last bus to Manchester."

Jordan relaxed, feeling a ripple of embarrassment at the mention of Manchester. Not that he believed for a minute Odell's malicious gossip.

Chiverton paused at the study door. "Make yourself at home. Join me in a beer?"

"Thanks very much, sir." But then he jumped up as the older man returned. "Maybe I shouldn't have come. It's just that I had to talk to someone and there really isn't anyone else—"

"Not quite the most flattering remark I've heard today," said Chiverton, commencing the ritual of lighting his pipe.

"Oh no, sir, I didn't mean that. I mean there's no one else I can trust. Only thing is, what I tell you, can it be just between us?"

"My study is my confessional. I say, you do look a bit off-color, my boy. It can't be that bad, surely."

"It is, sir. It couldn't be worse."

"In that case you'd better get it off your chest before it crushes you."

Jordan took a swallow of beer too rapidly, tried to stifle a belch. "Sorry. It's about a girl, sir."

"Ah."

"Her name's Debra. Debra Wimber. She was a waitress in Clovenford. I met her a couple of months ago."

"Older than you, is she?"

"A bit, yes. Very pretty." Jordan consciously deepened his voice. "I haven't had a lot of experience with girls, you know, sir."

"When I was eighteen I'd had *no* experience."

"You know how the townies treat us guys. Like we're a bunch of spoiled rich kids. Debra was different. At least I thought she was. She seemed to like me a lot. I thought I was in love with her."

Chiverton asked how often he'd seen her and Jordan replied, whenever he could. "Just in town at first. And we wrote to each other. Then we started to meet down by the river. There's an abandoned boathouse."

"There usually is."

"Sir?"

"In my case it was a derelict boxcar," said Chiverton. "Much less romantic. You're trying to tell me, I assume, that these clandestine

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

meetings were not solely for the purpose of conversation."

The color deepened in Jordan's face. "It was the first time for me, sir. Honest."

Chiverton was faintly amused by the boy's eagerness to proclaim his innocence. "And for her as well?"

"No. I mean, I don't think so. She knew a lot more. Anyway, a couple of weeks ago I got a note from her. She said she had to see me right away. We met at the boathouse. She told me she was pregnant."

"I see. But surely you both weren't so naive as not to realize the danger."

"She told me not to worry. She'd make sure nothing happened. I guessed something must've gone wrong."

"So how did you react to this news?"

Jordan hesitated. That he hadn't yet provoked any note of censure in the teacher's tone surprised him and encouraged him to speak with less constraint. "It knocked me out. The funny thing is, sir, she didn't seem the least bit worried. Quite happy about it, in fact. She said, 'You'll have to leave school, you know. We'll have to get married.' "

Chiverton cocked an eyebrow. "What did you say to that?"

"I didn't know what to say. I told her I'd have to think about it and she said, don't think too long."

"Did you tell anyone about this?"

"Only Odell, my best buddy. I was really desperate, sir. I didn't want to leave school. Give up Yale and all my plans. Debra kept asking me if I'd told my folks. She knew all about them, of course. I mean about their having money and everything and she said they'd have to 'come across.' She seemed to take it for granted they'd give us everything we wanted—a honeymoon and a house and a car, a job for me in my dad's business. She had me in a tailspin. I was really sick about the whole thing. My grades took a nosedive."

"We know," said Chiverton drily.

"That's when I started getting these bad thoughts. I got to thinking about that old movie where Robert Wagner is this college guy who gets himself in the same fix and ends up pushing his girlfriend off a roof. I don't mean I *planned* to do anything like that. It was more like a fantasy where I kept imagining all the ways Debra might have an accident. I guess we were both on fantasy trips. When I tried to tell her we maybe weren't ready for all this she went a little haywire, said if I tried to weasel out she'd go to the Headmaster

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and she'd tell my parents and I'd be up to my neck in trouble. That's when I started to hate her."

While talking, Jordan had squeezed the empty beer can into a crumpled ball. Chiverton's expression had grown increasingly perturbed, his gaze more searching.

"Well, anyway, sir, I made her believe I hadn't any intention of backing out. We made a date to meet at the boathouse last night. There's this old dinghy there and once or twice we'd gone out on the river. I told her it was a perfect night for a row. I swear there was nothing bad in my mind, sir. At least not consciously. I just suddenly felt I couldn't breathe in that musty boathouse. When we were on the water she made believe we were on our own yacht. Fantasy talk, you know. She said, 'We'll be really superrich when your parents die, won't we, Jordy?' That was too much. I came right out and told her I wasn't going to marry her. She started bitching at me, threatening me. We were in the middle of the river where it's real deep and I knew she couldn't swim and I was thinking what if we had an accident. What if she fell in and I couldn't save her."

At this point Chiverton made a gesture, not to silence the boy, but as if to give himself time to absorb the full gravity of what he was being told, a cautionary gesture of which Jordan took no notice.

"I stood up in the boat and sort of rocked it, and she squealed and held on and I kept making it rock more and more until finally it capsized and Debra screamed and went under the water. I watched her thrashing and gasping and I knew she was going to drown and I didn't care. I didn't *care*. She knew, of course. I'll never forget the look in her eyes. And then she cried out to me that it wasn't true. I heard her say, 'I'm not pregnant. I lied. Help me! Help me!'

"She could have been lying then, too, for all I knew, but it was like I suddenly realized what was happening and I knew I couldn't just let her drown. I got her out of the water . . ."

A look of immeasurable relief passed over the teacher's face. "Thank God you did."

"I kept telling her it was an accident but she knew it wasn't. I said I was only trying to scare her but she wouldn't listen. She kept screaming that I'd tried to kill her and she'd make me sorry. She said she'd tell everyone I'd assaulted her and then tried to murder her. She said I'd go to jail, not to Yale. Well, the upshot of it all was that she promised to keep quiet if I made it worth her while. I told her I didn't have any money and she said I could get it off my parents or take the consequences. She finally said two thousand dollars

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would save my skin. That she had to have at least that much because she wanted to go to New York and become a model."

"A change of fantasies in midstream, or almost." Chiverton leaned back in his chair and regarded the boy with a mixture of vexation and compassion. "It must have dawned on you by then that this might have been her intention from the start. To extort money from you one way or another."

Jordan shook his head. "Even so, I tried to *kill* her."

"Did you? Or, as you said, only to scare her?"

Jordan sighed heavily and looked down at the floor. "I don't know. I don't suppose I'll ever know for sure. If she hadn't admitted she wasn't pregnant maybe I'd have let her drown."

"I don't believe that, and I don't think you do either. You're a man of thought, Jordan, and you'd be surprised how few of the boys who've passed through my classroom deserve that compliment. For such men to commit murder requires a degree of insensitivity you don't possess."

A flickering light seemed to break through the cloud of misery on Jordan's face. "You're not just saying that, sir, to make me feel better?"

Chiverton spoke now in that tone of passionate conviction which had always stirred Jordan's imagination in the classroom. "Not at all. Don't get me wrong. History is full of men of thought—even intellectual giants—who *have* committed murder, but these were not boys whose vision of the world was still fresh and unsullied. These were men who'd become desensitized by experience, whose values had been betrayed or whose finer instincts had been brutalized by life. No, Jordan, I'm not condoning your behavior in all this. It was unworthy of you. But I trust it has made you a wiser person."

The boy's expression remained uncertain. "Maybe I should have married her. At least then I'd never have learned I might be capable of murder."

"Rubbish," said Chiverton severely. "To have made that mistake might in time indeed have led to tragedy. As ill-matched a pair as you'd have made, bitterness and cynicism would have deadened your spirit. You might have done anything to escape the trap into which you'd fallen."

Jordan's face wore now the rapt look of an acolyte at the altar of Eternal Wisdom. "I'm glad I told you, sir. I knew if anyone could understand, you would. My dad sure wouldn't, nor the Headmaster."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Perhaps not. But then perhaps neither your father nor Mr. Underwood has had the misfortune to become the victim of *La Belle Dame sans merci.* You do remember your Keats, I trust."

Jordan smiled. "I'm sure I won't be caught 'palely loitering' on the riverbank again, sir." Then the clouds once again descended. "I'm still in an awful mess, sir. You don't know Debra. She really does mean to make trouble for me."

"I suggest you leave the young woman to me," said Chiverton, moving to his desk to pick up a pad and pencil. "You will give me her address. I have to drive into Clovenford this evening, anyway. I'll talk to her. I'm confident she'll listen to reason. If not, well, her demands luckily are on the modest side."

"But, sir, I haven't got that kind of money."

"We'll call it an investment in your future. You can repay me when you've become a successful architect."

Jordan leaped up and pumped the teacher's hand with a painful pressure. "You've saved my life, sir. I'll never forget it."

"I'll likely not be back until late tonight, but we'll talk again in the morning."

Chiverton followed Jordan to the door and stood watching as the boy climbed the knoll toward Fancher Hall. Halfway there he turned, waved, then broke into a run. As if he himself had been running in place for the past hour, Chiverton felt now oppressed by a sense of extreme fatigue. Pensively, he mused upon the extraordinary irony of the situation, thankful the boy had been unaware of it. Presently, he returned to the study and picked up the phone. He dialed the Headmaster's number.

"Charles? It's David. I thought I should inform you that our little problem is solved. Luana's gone. I put her on the last bus to Manchester. She won't be back."

A long silence and then in a tone of weary satisfaction Underwood said: "I'm sorry, David. I hope you'll forgive me for being so adamant. You understand why I felt it necessary. Her indiscretions had reached a point where scandal seemed inevitable. Even the boys had begun to talk. And we should have hated to lose you."

"The last thing I would have allowed, Charles, is a scandal that might have damaged the school."

"Good man."

Chiverton put down the phone and crossed to the window overlooking the garden. Beyond a cloud of fading forsythia the patch of bare earth where he'd uprooted the rosebed awaited his shovel. He'd

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

always wanted a catalpa tree like the one outside his bedroom window when he was a boy. And under the circumstances a tombstone was out of the question.

"Ah, Luana," he murmured, "if only you'd listened to reason."

He would never forget the look of malice on her face as she'd taunted him. "You'll never get rid of me, David. Just try it and I'll create a scandal that'll rock the foundations of your beloved Burnmill School."

No, she'd left him no choice.

He knew he should go out and plant the tree but he simply hadn't the energy, not that it would be nearly so laborious a task as burying her had been the night before. He would wait until morning. No four-footed creatures would likely disturb the grave.

Darkness had fallen when the idea suddenly popped into Jordan's head.

Odell protested. "What do you mean, you're going back? Why do you have to talk to Chiverton again?"

"I don't. He won't be there. I just thought of something I could do for him. A surprise."

"Like what?"

Jordan smiled, pleased at the thought of being able to render even so insignificant a service.

"Plant a tree," he said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S ANTHOLOGY WAREHOUSE SALE!

Join us in our first anthology warehouse sale with great savings! For only $12.95 (includes postage and handling), you will receive five classic Alfred Hitchcock anthologies. Our warehouse is packed with anthologies that will provide you with hours of great reading. Act quickly...this sale is for a limited time.

Please send your name and address with your check or money order for $12.95 to:

Alfred Hitchcock
P.O. Box 40
Vernon, NJ 07462 MXNH-9

While we cannot accommodate requests for specific anthologies, we guarantee that you will be delighted with your surprise assortment.

Available only in the US and Canada. Canadian orders please add $4.00 (US funds only). Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Garth story by

GEORGE C. CHESBRO

George Chesbro planned this series of Garth Frederickson stories for EQMM *as a means of giving the supporting character in his novels a medium in which to come into his own. Many readers will be familiar with the Mongo books, in which Garth Frederickson's brother, a dwarf whose genius makes him a formidable investigator and criminologist, takes the lead. In this story we see Garth's particular talents at work on a case that involves an insidious misuse of animals. . . .*

LONE WOLF

by GEORGE C. CHESBRO

He hadn't thought they'd risk releasing the animals, for free of their brutal handler and running as a pack they would be unpredictable, seemingly posing as much danger to his hunters as to him; but when he saw the three dark shapes glide through a patch of moonlight next to the high-voltage fence separating him from the river on his right he knew he'd been wrong, had underestimated the hatred and desperation of the men who would kill him. He cut to his left, started to climb the steep embankment toward the rock face fifty yards above him, grimaced with pain when he felt his left ankle give and twist in the loamy soil. He went down on his right side, brought his left leg up, and tentatively touched the ankle. It did not seem broken, only sprained, but in his situation it made little difference, for immobilization here among the trees and thick brush surely meant death, if not in a blunt needle-spray of gunfire, then with his throat torn out by the fangs of the creatures who might or might not be stalking him in their mutilated silence. He

© *1993 by George C. Chesbro.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

willed himself to move, rolling over on his back and awkwardly crab-walking up the slope, dragging his left leg. He expected at any moment to hear a rustle in the brush that would presage his death, but there remained in the woods only the sound of his own heavy breathing as he struggled upward. Then he emerged from the tree line at the edge of the sloping field of broken rock at the base of the sheer wall of trap rock that was the eastern face of an abandoned quarry that formed the western boundary of Floyd Kunkel's inherited riverfront estate. He twisted around onto his stomach and snaked his way through the sharp riprap up to the base of the escarpment, where, exhausted, he sank down behind a large boulder and gasped for breath. He wiped his bleeding palms on his thighs, then gently kneaded his sprained ankle as he looked around him. From here he could see above the trees to a shimmering, silver-coated section of the river near where Mary had been the first to sight the exhausted animal swimming in the middle of the deep channel, struggling against both tide and current, directly in the path of an oncoming tanker.

"Garth," Mary cried, pointing to the bobbing patch of dark fur off their starboard side, "there's a dog out there! We have to save it!"

Garth Frederickson glanced up at the steel shrouds on either side of the fourteen-foot catamaran where plastic telltales fluttered in a wind that remained between fifteen and eighteen knots, coming directly from the southwest. In order to avoid the tanker approaching from the north, he had just tacked out of the deep channel, sailing to the port side of a large, green buoy that marked the edge of the shipping lane in the vast, four-mile-wide section of the Hudson River between Piermont and Haverstraw, New York, that the first Dutch settlers had called the "Tappan Sea." They were on a run, with the wind at their backs. Their speed would increase considerably if he fell off to either port or starboard, left or right; on their port side, across the river, was Rockland County and their home in Cairn; to fall off to starboard was to invite an abrupt and brutal end to their lives.

"The tanker's too close, Mary. There isn't time."

"There *is* if you turn now! We'll be on a reach! We can make it! You can't just let it be run over!"

"I'm not about to risk my wife's life for a dog."

"They'll turn when they see our sail!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That's a seventy-five-ton tanker, Mary, not a sports car. In the position they're in now and at the speed they're traveling, they can't swerve to avoid the dog or us. The ship's too big. You know that."

"Garth, listen to me," Mary Tree said in a voice that had suddenly grown low and husky, quavering and desperate. "You know how crazy I get about . . . It's just very important to me for us to try to save that dog. *Please* just try."

Garth turned his head slightly in order to look at his wife, who was sitting next to him on the port side of the catamaran. Strands of her waist-length, silver-streaked blond hair had worked free of the cotton band that held it in a ponytail and were whipping across her face. Tears welled in her sea-blue eyes, rolled down her cheeks. She was rhythmically pounding her fists in helpless frustration against the front of her heavy life jacket. Garth knew what he had to do. His wife's exquisite madness was the sometimes dark engine that powered her music, and her vehement passion for small as well as great things was one of the reasons he loved her so much. At this moment the most important thing in the world to her was not her life, or even his, but saving an animal that was on some inexplicable and hopeless mission, swimming, struggling against the tide, toward its certain death. He would feel bad if the dog were run over and ground up by the tanker's propeller blades, but it was Mary who would enter the soul and body of the dog in recurring nightmares, Mary who would suffer the bone-smashing collision with steel, feel the river filling her lungs, hear through the water the deadly song of whirring blades of steel.

"Swim to the buoy," he said as he swept her off the catamaran with his left arm at the same time as he pulled on the tiller to turn the cat ninety degrees to starboard.

He ducked under the swinging boom, slid across the cat's canvas trampoline to the opposite side as the wind filled the sail and the starboard hull began to lift out of the water. He sheeted out the sail slightly, released the traveler to the three-quarter's mark, then anchored his feet in the hiking straps and leaned far back in order to counterbalance the force of the wind that was sending the cat streaking like some misshapen white arrow directly into the path of the oncoming tanker. Mary shouted something at him, but her words were lost first in the hiss of the port hull slicing through the water, then drowned out completely by the ominous, deep-throated bray of the tanker's horn warning him away.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Despite the brisk breeze, the surface of the river was relatively smooth, allowing Garth to plane, flying the starboard hull on which he was sitting a foot or so above the water, increasing his speed. He glanced up once at the tanker, which had become a moving wall of steel filling the horizon, then looked away, focusing his vision and all his concentration on the furry, dark head bobbing just above the surface seventy-five yards away. He had dismissed from his mind fear of being crushed by the tanker the moment he had committed and veered sharply to starboard; he would simply either make it under the bow of the tanker or he wouldn't, and it wouldn't take many heartbeats for him to find out which was going to be the case. The task at hand required all his attention, for it was a complicated one; if he miscalculated, he could shoot right past the dog, which would make it all a wasted exercise; or the sudden addition of weight as he pulled the dog from the water could cause the cat to flip backward, and they would both die anyway.

The tanker was almost on him now, its great horn wailing its mournful dirge even as the ship's bow wave rolled under his port hull, lifting the cat slightly. Above him, at the edge of his peripheral vision, he glimpsed perhaps a half-dozen men standing at the railing, shouting and waving their arms, urging him on. The tip of the flying starboard hull passed just in front of the dog's head. He sheeted in the mainsail hard, causing the hull on which he was sitting to begin to rise even higher into the air. The small cat would have flipped over if at the same time he hadn't arched his back, reached down, and grabbed a handful of fur and skin on the neck of the animal struggling in the water behind and below him. Pain shot up his arm and into his back as the sudden tug of the animal's weight combined with the speed of the catamaran insulted bone and muscle and threatened to pull his right shoulder from its socket. The raised hull of the cat abruptly slammed down into the water as Garth hauled the animal up out of the water and into the center of the trampoline. He sheeted out instantly and shifted his weight to prevent the cat from flipping over backward, and then the surge of the ship's bow wave carried him away from the tanker, just inches from the painted steel wall that now rushed past him. When the wake had passed he came about and began the series of short tacks that would take him back to the green buoy where Mary waited, and as he looked into the glazed, golden eyes of the exhausted animal beside him, noted the long, spindly legs and large feet, he realized that the animal he had rescued from the river was not a dog.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It's a wolf," Garth said to his wife the next day when she came around the side of the house to the area where he had staked the animal next to the river on a heavy chain wound around a boulder erupting from their beach a few yards above the high-tide mark. He had been working the animal all morning, repeatedly wrestling it to the ground, cuffing it sharply on one side of the head and then the other when it tried to resist.

He waited for a response, but Mary Tree simply stood and stared at him, her limpid blue eyes moist, her face a kind of diary of unspoken thoughts. Garth straddled the wolf, squeezing its rib cage with his knees, and smiled at this woman whom he loved so much, the only person besides his brother who had ever made him feel complete. He had always found this professional folk singer terribly fragile, often conflicted and inarticulate without a guitar in her hands and with no music to accompany her words. She had spoken little since the day before when he had picked her up at the buoy, but she had expressed her feelings most adequately with her body, clinging to him throughout the rest of the day and into the night, repeatedly taking him into her until finally, exhausted, they had fallen asleep.

At last she said in a small voice, "A wolf?"

"Yep. Somebody's idea of a pet." He grabbed the thick leather collar he had put around the wolf's neck, brought the animal's head back, then used the fingers of his left hand to part the fur on its throat to reveal a circular scar the size of a quarter. "Its vocal cords have been cut. I guess his owner didn't want him bothering the neighbors."

Mary winced, put a hand to her cheek. "My God. How cruel." She came forward, knelt down on the sand beside Garth, a few inches from the large, dark gray head with its bright golden eyes. "It's beautiful."

The animal started to turn its head in Mary's direction. Garth pressed down on the back of its neck, then cuffed it lightly on the side of the jaw. "Yes. It's most likely a hybrid, with a little dog in it—but not much."

"Is that why you play so rough with it?"

"I'm not playing. Remember that this is a wolf, Mary, not a dog. They may look alike, but there the similarity ends. This fellow can snap your face off, and it will if you don't constantly pay attention to what's happening when you're around it. You can't domesticate a wolf. You can live with one, but you have to know the rules. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

first rule is that you must physically dominate it, and you have to keep doing it, because a wolf will keep testing you. This morning's workout was intended to show him who's leader of the pack around here."

Mary reached out and stroked the animal's fur, then rested her head on her husband's shoulder. "Garth, I . . . I . . . "

"I know what you want to say, Mary. It isn't necessary."

"Yes it is. I have to get it out. I can't imagine what I was thinking about yesterday. I just kind of went out of my mind when I saw this guy out there in front of the ship. But that's no excuse for the way I behaved. I can't believe I made you . . . Garth, I almost killed you."

"Hell, you could have been killed too. You weren't exactly expecting me to dump you in the river. Besides, you didn't make me do anything. I wasn't very happy with the situation either. It was the right thing to do, and we did it."

"You did it. And I not only let you risk your life, I damn well insisted on it."

"Mary, I really do under—"

"Oh, Garth, I love you so much. Truly, I don't know what I'd do without you. In so many ways, I feel I owe you everything."

"Come on, sweetheart, you were famous long before my brother introduced us."

"When you met me I was a has-been, and hiding out here in Cairn. You gave me back my confidence."

Garth waved his hand in a dismissive gesture, kissed his wife on the cheek, then, still keeping a firm grip on the wolf's collar, stood up. "Move back a little. I want to take our friend here to the vet to get his shots, in case he hasn't had any, and I have to go get the muzzle I bought him."

"I'm all right here. He seems friendly enough—which is a wonder, considering the way you've been swatting him around. Let me just stay here with him. He has to get used to me as well as you."

Garth thought about it, nodded. "Okay. Scratch him behind the ears; he likes that. But keep a firm grip on the chain, right behind his head, and don't put your face close to his."

When Mary gripped the chain as he had instructed her, Garth released his hold on the animal's collar, then went back up the beach and into the boathouse to get the muzzle and heavy leather leash he had purchased earlier in the morning. When he returned, he found Mary staring down at a stain on her pants leg.

"Garth," she said with a nervous laugh, "he peed on my leg!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Garth walked quickly to where Mary was standing, grabbed the wolf's collar, and forced it down onto the sand. He turned it over on its back, sat on its stomach, then gripped its throat with both hands.

"Garth—?!"

"I know what I'm doing, Mary. I'm not punishing it—but you have to do exactly as I say. Bite him on the nose. Hard."

"What?! I can't do that."

"Well, you're going to have to if this animal is going to stay with us. When he pissed on your leg, he was challenging you. That was his way of seeing if he could push you around. Now you have to push back—only harder. If you don't, you'll constantly be in danger. I'll turn it over to the animal shelter rather than risk having it attack you, and they'll almost certainly end up having to put it down. This animal could be a big problem. If you want him to live, you have to show him you're the boss. If you want yesterday's rescue to mean anything, you'll do as I say."

Mary slowly knelt down, bent over toward the wolf's head, hesitated.

"Do it!" Garth said sharply. "It's for his own good! Bite him hard!"

Mary closed her eyes, opened her mouth, closed her teeth gently on the moist, black leather nose, then snapped her head back in alarm when she heard an anguished, raspy whimper from somewhere deep within the animal's chest.

Garth released his grip on the wolf's throat, got up off its stomach. The animal turned over, but remained flat on the sand, its head down between its forelegs. Garth grunted with satisfaction, then fitted the muzzle over the wolf's jaws and replaced the tether chain on the collar with the leather leash. "That wasn't very hard," he said, stroking his wife's cheek, "but I think it may have done the job."

"How do you know so much about wolves? Mining for gold in Alaska?"

"Partly. Actually, it was my brother who taught me that little trick."

"Your *brother?*"

"Uh-huh. You know the story about the lobo, but you've never seen it. One of these days we'll visit one of the closed, experimental breeding pens at the Bronx Zoo and I'll show you the fellow *he* took on. In the meantime, we've got to figure out what we're going to do with our own beastie here. Call *The Journal News,* have them run an ad in the Classifieds—make it an eighth of a page, with a border

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

around it. Have it read: 'Unusual Pet Rescued From River. For Information Call—' and give our number."

"You're going to give him back?"

"Hardly. You might also want to take a run to the butcher."

"Meat for the wolf?"

Garth laughed, and described a circle in the air with his finger to include the three of them. "Wolf has already had tonight's pork chops for his breakfast," he replied, and would later recall his words with a certain grim amusement when he was trapped with an entire pack of the creatures that could, sooner or later, be considering him as a candidate for a meal.

Throughout the night he had seen pairs of eyes glowing among the trees at the edge of the rock fall as members of the pack came and went, but none of the animals attempted to negotiate the treacherous slope of broken rock to get at him. He knew that in the wild wolves will go to extreme lengths to avoid contact with humans, so all things being equal, he should not be in great danger of imminent attack. But all things were not equal. These hybrid wolves were not in the wild; they were trapped, like himself, in a giant enclosure where he was the only pork chop around, and he had no idea when they had last eaten. In addition, they had been brutalized, first as cubs by having their vocal cords cut out, and then, presumably, through the kind of training that had conditioned in them the savage reactions he had observed in the animal he had rescued from the river. In short, the behavior of these animals, as individuals and as a pack, would be unpredictable. And he had only the rocks he held in each hand to defend himself against the pack's fangs and the guns of the men who would come during the day.

As dawn broke he found one animal, a male who was either very hungry or intent on establishing territory, standing at the edge of the rock fall and looking up at him. Almost five minutes passed, and then the wolf bared his fangs and started up toward him, picking its way carefully through the sharp riprap. Garth casually tossed the rocks he was holding in the wolf's direction, then picked up two more. He was not so much concerned with holding off the wolf, which could not maneuver well in the broken rock, as he was with the stalking animal giving away his position to Kunkel's young, would-be storm troopers, perhaps led by Franz Heitman, who had certainly begun fanning out through the enclosure at first light. The worry became academic when a burst of fire from an automatic weapon

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

caused the animal to spin around and bound back into the trees.

Garth recognized the young man who emerged from the tree line twenty-five yards away, to his right, as one of the two companions of the acne-scarred man whose jaw he had broken at Hood Mountain in Nyack. Then he had worn black leather, but now he was dressed in an ill-fitting khaki uniform with the group's lightning-bolt-and-cross patch on the left sleeve. Although the morning was cool, with a steady breeze from the river, the young man's shaved head glistened with sweat, and his hand trembled slightly as he raised his Ingram MAC 10 machine pistol and aimed it at the spot where Garth sat behind the boulder.

"That's a lot of firepower you're carrying there, kiddo," Garth said easily, "but the problem with it is that it sprays bullets all over the damn place. Be careful you don't shoot your dick off."

"You're not such a big shot now, are you, Frederickson?" the man said in a tight voice that cracked. "Get down here!"

Garth wriggled his damaged left ankle in his boot. It was still decidedly sore, but there was no longer the stabbing pain that had disabled him before. It would hold his weight. "I can't. I twisted my ankle."

"Get up or I'll kill you!" the man shouted, his eyes glinting with both hatred and fear as he started to advance up the slope toward Garth.

"So kill me. What do you have to lose, except twenty to twenty-five years tacked onto the prison sentence you're already likely to get? You'll certainly make Kunkel and the man you call Otto, not to mention your bird-brain buddies, happy, at least in the short term, because right now they're probably trying to figure out what to do with me if *they* find me. Like you said, I'm a big shot."

The man advanced another ten yards, and Garth threw a rock with a hard sidearm motion, aiming at the man's head. He missed, but the sharp stone sailing past his left ear made the man flinch, and then stumble on the rocks at his feet. By the time he recovered, Garth was on him, punching him in the throat, then on the side of the head. The man fell, hitting his head against a boulder, and did not move. Garth did not check to see if he was dead or alive, for he didn't care. He picked up the machine pistol, checked to make certain that the special cloth he carried in his jacket pocket was hidden yet secure, then, limping only slightly, headed down into the trees. Now that he had a weapon, he was no longer interested in running or hiding, or trying to find a way to escape from the enclosure. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would see how these young men and their masters, who dreamed of the deaths of so many, liked it when they faced their own deaths at the hands of a man who loathed them as much as they loathed their intended victims. And he knew there was an outraged veterinarian who would very much approve of his present course of action.

"You know," Sarah Bleekman had said, eyeing Garth suspiciously as she removed the needle from the flank of the muzzled animal that lay on the examining table under the tall man's firm grip, "what you've got here is mostly wolf."

"I do know, Doctor," Garth replied evenly, stroking the animal's quivering hide as the veterinarian prepared a second hypodermic. "It's a hybrid. It's got some dog in it, but not much—maybe five percent or less, just enough for some breeder to leave a paper trail that would make it legal to own in some states."

"Not in this state," the round-faced woman with short, dark hair replied in a clipped tone that displayed her severe disapproval. "It doesn't belong here."

"No."

"This is a very dangerous animal. You need a special license to keep one, and then you have to show a special reason. Wanting to own an unusual pet to impress the neighbors isn't good enough."

"I appreciate the information."

Sarah Bleekman studied the famous man with the shoulder-length, wheat-colored hair and matching eyes who stood across from her on the opposite side of the examining table. He had, she thought, a mysterious, perhaps mystical, aura of gentleness combined with an implacable toughness, was probably not afraid of anything, and would be very dangerous to the wrong kinds of people. This was the first time she had ever spoken to Garth Frederickson, but like virtually everyone else in Cairn, she knew who he was; he was a celebrity, like his folk singer wife, whose career had blossomed in the sixties, been eclipsed, and was once more in ascendance. She had read the newspaper stories and heard the wild rumors about this man who, teamed with his even more famous brother, ran probably the world's best-known private investigation agency, an enterprise that seemed to virtually specialize in bizarre cases that made news. But she often saw Garth Frederickson and Mary Tree in town, and they never acted like the celebrities they were, never put on airs. She certainly did not believe all the stories she'd heard about the fantastic exploits of the Frederickson brothers, but if even half

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of them were true, Garth Frederickson was a brave man indeed. He did not seem like the type of man who would need to keep a dangerous pet to bolster his ego. "Did you have his vocal cords cut out?"

"No. As a matter of fact, I was going to ask you if you knew any other veterinarian in the area who might have been persuaded to perform such a procedure."

She shook her head, found that tears had sprung to her eyes. "Then it doesn't belong to you?"

"I fished it out of the river yesterday. It was going someplace, or after something, that was very important to it; he'd been swimming against the tide and current to the point where he was exhausted. Even if he hadn't been about to be run over by a tanker, I believe he would have kept swimming until he drowned, or his heart burst."

"Do you know where he was going, or what he was after?"

"No."

She finished, patted the animal's flank, stroked its fur. "Except for the fact that it's been mutilated and can't communicate vocally with its own kind, it's healthy. And now he's had his shots against rabies and distemper. But you do agree that it isn't a suitable pet?"

"I thought I'd said so," Garth replied quietly, holding the wolf's leash tightly as the animal bounded off the table and looked up at Garth with its golden eyes. "How much do I owe you, Doctor?"

"You saved his life, and I gave him his shots. We'll call it even. May I ask what you plan to do with him?"

"Try to find a suitable home."

"That won't be easy, Mr. Frederickson. The only suitable home for this animal is in the wild, and he can't go back there."

"I don't think he's ever been in the wild; my guess is that he was bred. Are you recommending that I have him put down?"

Sarah Bleekman quickly shook her head. "I'm not recommending that at all."

"Then I'll just have to do the best I can, won't I?"

"Let me know if I can help you. Seeing what's been done to this animal . . . kind of makes me mad."

"You can let me know if anybody else with a wolf comes to see you, or if you can think of anybody—veterinarian or skilled amateur—who might have cut this animal."

Jeffrey Bond, the Cairn chief of police, was in his office, a grim expression on his face as he sorted through a small pile of crudely printed posters and pamphlets. The thickset man with the crooked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nose looked up as Garth knocked and entered, then smiled thinly and motioned Garth to a chair.

"Got a couple of minutes, Chief?"

"For you, my friend, I've always got a couple of minutes." He paused, pushed the pamphlets and posters aside with a gesture of distaste. "Besides, I'm tired of looking at this garbage."

"What garbage?"

"We've got ourselves a neo-Nazi outfit in town. They call themselves Angry Cross. They opened up a storefront down at the end of Main Street, staffed by a bunch of skinheads. They're trying to turn Cairn into Creep City. They seem to be having an influence on some of the more dysfunctional members of our little community, and we're getting a rash of synagogue and Jewish cemetery desecrations. I can't stand it."

"Bust them."

"Can't. Protected speech."

"Defacing synagogues and desecrating cemeteries isn't protected speech."

"No, but we have to catch somebody actually doing that, and then tie them to Angry Cross. We haven't been able to do that so far—but we will." Bond cursed softly under his breath as he swept the papers onto the floor, then sighed as he turned back to Garth. "How's your smart little brother? Usually he's up here every weekend during the summer, but I haven't seen him around lately."

"My smart little brother is over in Europe taking care of business with some corporate clients while I hold down the fort here."

"What can I do for you, Garth?"

"A couple of things. First, I want to report what I think could be a crime in progress."

"And what crime do you think could be progressing?"

"I've got a hybrid wolf out in my van. I fished it out of the river yesterday."

"What the hell is a hybrid wolf?"

"A big, bad wolf with a little dog bred into it. They breed them legally in Alaska, where they're a hot item as pets. I've got a small mining claim in Alaska, and I used to spend some time there before I got married, so I've seen a lot of hybrid wolves. They're dangerous."

"How dangerous?"

"Keeping one as a household pet would be about the equivalent of bringing a leopard, or a bear, into your home; you could do it, but best not be prone to carelessness."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So it's very dangerous," Bond said with a curt nod. "And that makes it illegal in New York State. Any tags on it?"

"No. And there's more to it. This animal had its vocal cords cut, and it's an old scar. That indicates to me that the owner, or breeder, planned from the time it was a pup on bringing it into a heavily populated area. When you hear a wolf howl, you know it's no dog—and wolves howl a lot. It would be bound to attract attention. Cut their vocal cords, and they don't howl. Maybe only this animal was cut, and then delivered on special order. But maybe not."

"You're suggesting that some breeder may be attempting some market expansion?"

"I think it's possible that mutilated wolf cubs are being shipped down here from Alaska to people willing to pay a premium for them, or even that they're being bred around here. Now, some people might ask, who the hell would want to keep a wolf in the city, or in a town like Cairn? Well, you and I know there are lots of folks who think they might want a wolf—but especially people who are into intimidation, personally or professionally."

Bond slowly nodded. "Like drug dealers thinking to make a switch from pit bulls as the attack dog of choice to wolves."

"The thought occurred to me, and I wanted to share it with you."

"What are you going to do with it, Garth?"

"If I turn it over to the shelter or the state police, my guess is that they'll eventually feel they have no choice but to destroy it. Mary would certainly not be pleased, and I'd hate to think I saved it from drowning only to have it killed. It's not the animal's fault that it was brought here, or that its vocal cords were cut and it can't be put out into the wild. I'd like to try to find a home for it, maybe with one of my friends in Alaska, or in one of the western states where they're legal. But I need some time. I have no right to keep a dangerous animal in Cairn for any length of time, and I don't want to. I was hoping you could give me some kind of short-term special license."

"How much time do you need?"

"Hard to say, Chief."

"How about a month?"

"That should be more than enough."

"You've got it. I can't do anything in Cairn that would supercede the laws of New York State, but I'm going to have to get some very specific information on laws regarding a hybrid wolf, and that could take me just about a month. In the meantime, I'll give you a letter

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

specifying the conditions under which you found the animal, the fact that you immediately brought it to my attention, and so on. You may consider yourself the holder of a temporary permit to keep it—at least until I officially tell you otherwise."

Garth left his friend feeling satisfied with the situation, and he felt even better later in the day when Mary spent the afternoon with the animal, feeding it, walking it around the house, frequently wrestling it to the ground as he had taught her, and even occasionally gently nipping it on the ear to drive home the point, or illusion, of her dominance. Garth judged that the wolf now respected Mary, accepted her as master, and even liked her. He could also plainly see that Mary was quickly growing very attached to the wolf, not as a symbol of an endangered species about which she cared passionately, but as an individual. That worried him, but he would attend to the problem of their inevitable separation when he had to. In the meantime, he was satisfied that Mary would be safe with the wolf when he was not around. His usual good judgment in such matters made the wolf's reaction the next morning when Mary came down to the beach where he was working it even more startling.

"Garth, there's somebody on the phone calling about the ad. He says—"

The wolf's reaction was so quick and unexpected that Garth was caught totally by surprise. The animal had been lying on its side, tongue lolling out as Garth brushed his coat, but when Mary appeared he suddenly sprang to his feet, bared his fangs in a savage, silent snarl, and leaped forward. It was brought up short when it reached the end of its chain, fell down, but immediately got up again and lunged at her. But then Garth was on its back, pressing it to the ground, gripping it by the throat.

"Get back around the house!" he shouted at Mary.

Trembling, eyes wide with shock, Mary slowly backed away until she was around the side of the house, out of sight. Gradually the wolf stopped its struggles and grew very still, its body limp. It closed its eyes, made breathy mewling sounds in its throat. Garth released his grip on the animal's throat, but kept his hands in front of him as he slowly got up. The wolf remained on its side, limp, softly mewling—almost, Garth thought, as if it were ashamed. He retrieved the muzzle from the boathouse, put it on the unresisting wolf, then went to his wife.

Mary was wearing a jacket against the mild morning chill, but she had her arms wrapped around herself, as if she were cold. She

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was still trembling and ashen, her blue eyes flooded with tears. Garth stepped forward, held her tightly.

"Garth, what did I *do?!*"

"Nothing," Garth replied, then stepped back and thoughtfully studied his wife standing in front of him in her black leather jacket with its white leather piping and long fringes on the sleeves and bottom. "Take your jacket off."

"What?"

"Take off your jacket. Put it on the ground."

"Garth, there's a man on the phone."

"He'll wait, or he'll call back. Just do as I say, please. I want to see something."

Mary was thoroughly puzzled, but she did as her husband asked, removing her black and white leather jacket and tossing it behind her on the lawn.

Garth nodded, continued, "Now pull yourself together. Wait about a minute, then go back around to where the wolf can see you. It's important that you don't show fear; act as if nothing had happened."

"All right."

Garth walked back down to the beach where the wolf was still lying on its side, head resting on the sand, staring almost wistfully out at the river. Garth knelt down beside it, scratched it behind the ears. A few moments later Mary, a determined smile on her face, strode purposefully around the side of the house. The wolf saw her at once, but its reaction this time was totally different from what it had been less than five minutes before. It rolled over on its stomach, slowly got to its feet, and shuddered. With head down and tail drooping, it slouched toward her, and when it reached the end of its chain it dropped to its belly, once again resting its head on the sand.

Garth was too far away to stop Mary as she abruptly walked to the wolf and dropped to her knees beside its head. "You have been a very bad boy," she said sternly, wagging a finger in its face and cuffing it lightly on the jaw. Then she lay down on top of the animal and draped her arms lovingly around its neck.

Garth stood close by, watching the wolf's reactions carefully, and he didn't object when Mary removed the animal's muzzle. On his way back to the house he picked up the jacket off the lawn, then put it at the back of the top shelf of a closet before going to the phone.

"Yeah."

"You took your goddamn sweet time, pal."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You want to tell me what's on your mind, or do you want me to hang up?"

"I'm calling about the ad in the paper. You've got something that belongs to me."

"What?"

"A wolf."

"Right."

"I want it back. I'll give you a couple of bucks for your trouble."

"Where are you?"

"Blauvelt."

"I'll meet you at Hook Mountain in Nyack, in the parking lot down by the beach, in half an hour," Garth said, then hung up without waiting for a reply.

He checked on Mary, who was playing with, "working," the wolf, then went to his car and drove south to the state park in Upper Nyack, where he was waiting, sitting on a picnic table, when the wolf's owner arrived in a battered, rusting Jeep with two bumper stickers proclaiming White Power and a large window decal depicting a white bolt of lightning flashing across a red cross on a yellow background. The three young men in the car looked like identical triplets with their shaved heads; they were dressed alike in studded black leather jackets, pants, and boots, and even wore the same contemptuous sneers.

The man driving the Jeep got out, looked around, settled on Garth, and swaggered over to him. Garth put his age at twenty-three or -four. His face was a mapwork of purplish acne scars that almost matched his maroon eyes. He stopped in front of Garth, put his hands on his hips.

"You the guy I talked to on the phone about the wolf?"

"Yep."

"Where is it?"

"Home."

"What the hell—?!"

"The ad said to call for information, which is what I'm looking for, not that you'd get the wolf back. I want to know how you got it."

"It's none of your damn business," the man replied in a tone that was marked as much by surprise as anger. Then he signaled to his two companions. "You must be out of your mind, pal."

The other two identically dressed young men sauntered across the parking lot, stopped on either side of the scar-faced man to form a wall of flesh and studded black leather.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The wolf's owner leaned very close to Garth. "Now, what were you saying about not giving me back my wolf?"

"It's my wife's fault that I can't give him back to you," Garth replied easily. "She's an animal lover, and she doesn't like the way you've been treating him. She wondered how he happened to end up in the river."

"He ended up in the river because I kicked his ass off my friend's boat," the scar-faced man said with a humorless laugh that was filled with malice. "I've got two of 'em, and they were acting up and pissing all over the place. Now I can't do anything with the other one, and I'm thinking of blowing the bitch's brains out. I may shoot this one too, if it doesn't come around, but that'll be my choice. Now why don't you come along with us? We'll go to your house to pick up my wolf, and then we'll bring you back to your car."

It explained what the wolf was doing in the river, Garth thought, as well as its desperate struggle against tide and current; it was swimming in the direction where its mate had gone. "I don't think there's room in your Jeep for all of us," Garth said, and when he saw the owner's two companions reach into their pockets, he slammed his foot into the groin of the man on his right, then abruptly shoved off the table as he brought the heel of his right hand up under the scar-faced man's jaw, breaking it. The wolf's owner slumped unconscious to the ground next to his writhing companion. Garth stepped over the body, then turned to face the third man, who was standing as if frozen to the spot, his mouth open. Finally he brought his hand, which held a knife, all the way out of his pocket. He flicked his wrist, and a six-inch blade snapped out of the handle.

"That's a mistake," Garth said to the young man who would later come upon him on Floyd Kunkel's estate after pointing him to it. He stooped down over the scar-faced man at his feet and unbuckled the thick leather belt the man wore, snapping it from around his waist. Then, lazily swinging the buckle end of the belt over his head, he slowly advanced on the young man holding the knife. "I doubt very much that you've ever killed anyone, my young friend. You like to try to scare people to death. I'm just the opposite; I don't care if you're scared, but I will kill you if you don't drop that knife. Look around, and you'll see lots of people staring at us. They'll testify that I was attacked by three skinhead thugs. No problem."

When the man suddenly threw the knife to the ground, turned, and started to run for the car, Garth snapped, "Hold it!" The man

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stopped, slowly turned. Garth pointed to the two men on the ground. "There's no littering here. Take your garbage with you."

Still lazily swinging the belt, Garth sat back down on the bench and watched as the man with the large, muddy brown eyes helped the man Garth had kicked in the groin to his feet. Together, they carried the scar-faced man back to the Jeep, threw him in the back, and quickly drove away. Garth noted the plate number, intending to pass it on to Jeffrey Bond, whom he found waiting for him when he returned home. The Cairn chief of police was sitting in the music room with Mary, who looked pale and upset.

"We've got a problem with your wolf, Garth," the policeman said, rising to his feet as Garth entered the room. "A report just came in of an incident up in Ulster County. Yesterday an animal described as a wolf was let loose in a synagogue. There was a group of men, a minyan, praying in there. The wolf attacked. It killed one man, managed to get at his throat, and chewed up three others pretty good before somebody managed to get to a phone and call the police. They came and shot it."

Garth looked away as he felt sorrow well in him at the thought of the shock and horror the men must have felt as a gray juggernaut of death suddenly exploded into their midst. He would never understand the thinking of those responsible for the releasing of the wolf, but he did understand hatred. He hated. He despised these purveyors of hatred and death to the core of his being, and their very existence offended him. They were the human pustules on the face of life his mother had spoken of so often to his brother and him when they were children, the holes in the world through which good escaped and evil entered. He looked back at Jeffrey Bond, said, "The attack took place yesterday. It wasn't our wolf."

Bond stared at Garth for a few moments, slowly blinked. "That's an odd reaction."

"What's an odd reaction?"

"You don't seem surprised."

"I'm not surprised." Garth reached into his pocket, took out the slip of paper on which he had written the plate number of the Jeep, handed it to the policeman. "That's the license-plate number of a Jeep that I think belongs to the wolf's owner. He may live in Blauvelt, but if he doesn't, it should be easy enough to find out where he does live. I just met him and two of his buddies. They're skinheads, neo-Nazis, probably allied with the Angry Cross people who run your friendly little bookshop here in town. You should have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Orangetown Police check this guy out, because he says he has another wolf—a female."

Bond studied his friend's face, nodded. "I'll certainly do that. How did you come to meet these skinheads?"

"I put an ad in the paper about the wolf. One of them answered it."

"You were thinking of giving the wolf back?"

"I was thinking of trying to find out who's breeding those animals here, or carting them down from Alaska."

"I appreciate your bringing this matter to my attention," Bond said carefully, narrowing his eyes slightly. "Everybody knows that you and your brother are the best private investigators in the business, but this has become a personal thing with you. Now, why don't you call your friends in Alaska like you said you would, and let me do my job?"

"I'm not interfering with the police, Jeff. And I am looking into this on behalf of a client."

"You didn't tell me that. May I ask who it is?"

"Mary, give me a dollar."

Mary looked at her husband in surprise. "What? My purse is in the bedroom."

"Jeff, lend Mary a dollar, would you?"

The police chief sighed and rolled his eyes, then took out his wallet and handed Mary a dollar bill, which Garth immediately took from her. "I'd hate to have you think I was acting like an amateur, Chief," Garth said with a slight smile. "Now Mary's officially my client. She's a very serious animal rights person, and this business of wolf captivity and mutilation offends her."

"That's right," Mary said, stepping close to her husband and kissing him loudly on the cheek.

The police chief grunted, shook his head. "Why don't you two righteous animal lovers take me to see this hairy friend of yours?"

Garth and Mary led the police chief out of and around the house to where the wolf was staked. The animal looked up, immediately leaped to its feet, bared its fangs, and charged to the end of its chain, where it was yanked back. It charged again, ears back flat against its head as it struggled to get at the man standing between Garth and Mary.

Jeffrey Bond paled, took a step backward, and reached for his gun.

"Jeff, no!" Mary cried, clutching the policeman's arm. "Don't shoot him!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"To call that animal dangerous is a serious understatement, Mary," Bond said in a low, tense voice. "It would be irresponsible for you to give it to anyone, in Alaska or anywhere else. There's no place for it. It's going to end up being killed anyway, so you may as well let me do the job for you right now and get it over with before it kills somebody. There are people who walk along this beach."

"It reacted to me the same way once, Jeff! There's something wrong with him! Somebody's done something to him to make him react that way!"

Bond kept his hand on his gun as he stared at the animal that was still straining at its chain, clawing at the sand under its feet, trying to get at him. "What are you talking about?"

"I don't *know* why he came at you like that, Jeff! But—"

"I think I do," Garth said as he took his friend's arm and gently but firmly led him back around the house. "Give me your jacket and hat, Jeff."

"What the hell are *you* talking about?"

"Just give them to me. Please."

Bond hesitated, but finally removed the articles of clothing and gave them to Garth, who put them on and walked back down toward the beach. There was no reaction from the wolf, which was what Garth had expected. He returned to the side of the house, gave the blue jacket and hat back to the police chief. "It's not the uniform," Garth said. "My guess is that he came at you because you're black. He's been conditioned to attack blacks—and Jews, when he thinks he sees one."

"What?"

"You said the wolf up in Ulster County attacked a group of men inside a synagogue. A wolf won't normally attack people. Unless it was cornered, which I seriously doubt, it would have slunk all over that synagogue, hidden under pews, whatever. That wolf had been conditioned to attack those men, probably because of what they were wearing, the same as this wolf was conditioned to attack you because of the color of your skin. If I'm right, we're talking about more than the illegal importation and the keeping of dangerous animals in the state. Now we're looking at murder, and conspiracy to commit murder. Somebody's using trained animals as murder weapons."

"How do you know all this?"

"I know something about wolves, and the rest is an educated guess based on my observations of this wolf's behavior. Give me time and I'll prove it. The way the wolf reacted to you isn't the wolf's fault,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

any more than having its vocal cords cut was its fault. If it was conditioned, it can be unconditioned. If you want to see that I'm right, have Orangetown pick up that creep in Blauvelt and sweat him. And you can pick up whoever it is that's running that hate factory in town. I think it's Angry Cross people who are responsible for these wolves. If the police don't act quickly, I predict there are going to be more wolf attacks, and more deaths."

Bond thought about it, gave a curt nod. "God knows you and your brother have some kind of track record at nosing out things like this. I'll look into it. I'll also check with the local cops upstate, and see if I can't get the state police interested. In the meantime, you've got a week to get rid of that animal."

"The wolf may be material evidence."

"Then the state police can take it, along with the responsibility."

"You said I had a month," Garth said to the policeman's back as the other man headed up toward the driveway.

Jeffrey Bond stopped, turned back. "Garth, you said the animal was dangerous, and you were right. I'm sorry, but right now I'll be responsible if some kid in this town gets eaten. If that wolf gets loose, or, God forbid, some kid walking the beach comes too close to it and gets hurt, it's my ass—because I know you're keeping it here. One week. Start making your calls to your friends in Alaska."

He called a friend and neighbor, an Orthodox Jew who lived in the next block. When he had the item he had asked to borrow, he went to his computer, punched in the code for DMV listings, and in a few minutes had the name and address of Conrad Regent, the Jeep's owner, who was just coming out of his mother's house where he lived when Garth pulled up in front. It was not the acne-scarred man, but the skinhead with the mud-colored eyes, and when he saw Garth he bolted for the Jeep parked in the driveway. But Garth was on him before he could get in, knocking him across the hood of the Jeep, wrapping the black and white fringed *tsallis* around his neck, dragging him across the lawn to the curb where his van, with the wolf inside, was parked.

"I brought your friend's pet back," Garth said quietly. "I've had a change of heart, and thought it was time you were all reunited."

"It'll kill me if you put me in there!" the young man said in a strangled whisper as he clawed at the prayer shawl wrapped around his throat and gazed in wide-eyed horror as the wolf snapped and clawed at the window separating them. "It'll be murder!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Garth pressed the man's face up against the saliva-streaked glass, rested his hand on the door handle. "Murder?" he said easily. "This is your friend's wolf. He wants it back, doesn't he? In fact, you came to help him pick it up, and you didn't seem all that nervous then. Is there something wrong?"

"You . . . know! It's the shawl! The wolf's trained to go after anyone wearing one!"

"And people with dark skin?"

The young man with the shaved head nodded.

"Who trains them?"

"I don't know!"

Garth banged the man's head against the window, and the wolf redoubled its efforts to get at him, fangs striking against the glass.

"Otto!" the man shrieked.

"Otto who?"

"Just Otto! That's what everybody calls him! He raises and trains them, cuts their vocal cords when they're cubs! He works for Mr. Kunkel!"

"Who's this Mr. Kunkel?"

"Floyd Kunkel! He's the one who gives away the wolves! He's the head of Angry Cross!"

Garth yanked on the prayer shawl, throwing the man to the pavement. "Where do I find Floyd Kunkel?"

The skinhead averted his eyes, swallowed hard. When he spoke, his voice quavered slightly, as if he were about to cry. "He lives in Cairn. He's got a big mansion down by the river, next to the quarry."

"Why does Kunkel give away the wolves? What are you supposed to do with them?"

The man had told him, and the rage that had surged through Garth then returned now, blotting out the pain in his ankle as he marched purposefully through the wooded grounds of Floyd Kunkel's estate, heading back to the mansion which afforded the only exit from the enclosure. He came across three of Kunkel's uniformed Angry Cross skinheads standing in an open, grassy area separating a firing range and an obstacle course. Garth made no effort to avoid the men as he stepped from the trees and walked at a fast pace directly toward them. The men saw him, started. The man on the left raised his weapon, and Garth shot him in the head. The other two men threw down their machine pistols, turned, and ran. Garth tossed the MAC 10s into a clump of brush and continued on in the direction of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mansion, toward the little man with the ill-fitting toupee and the most dangerous storm trooper of them all, the real one, the professional soldier who was behind everything, the savage mercenary who would kill not only him, but also his brother, and even his wife.

Mary had gently stroked his back as he'd checked his camera with its zoom lens and the miniature tape recorder strapped to his waist.

"I think what's been done to those animals upsets you even more than it does me."

"It certainly does upset me," Garth replied evenly as, satisfied that his equipment was in order, he replaced the camera and zoom lens in their case.

Mary wrapped her arms around her husband's waist, rested her head between his shoulder blades, hugged him. "I love you so very much, you very strange man."

Garth laughed, reached back, and patted his wife's bottom. "Now there's a wonderful compliment."

"There are so many things, so much feeling, deep inside you that you never show to other people."

"Well, whatever it is you think you see, I'm glad you approve."

"If you know who's breeding the wolves and giving them away, why don't you just go to Jeff and tell him?"

"That's exactly what I intend to do before the end of the day. But what you have to remember is that Jeff, as good a cop as he is, is only the head of a town police. He'll need all the help he can get to shut these people down, and it has to be done quickly, before anybody else gets mauled or killed. There's only so much Jeff can do on his own, and there are strict legal procedures he has to follow. Judging from the place he owns, Kunkel has a lot of money, and the first thing he's going to do when the police start showing interest in him is to hire a squad of sharp lawyers. Then the state police will come and impound our wolf, which will probably eventually be destroyed. The only killing that we know of that's connected with the wolves and Angry Cross took place near Kingston, which is a hundred miles outside Jeff's jurisdiction. We don't know how many more wolves there are out there, where they are, or the mental state of the crackpots who have them. Kunkel isn't going to give out those names to the police until he's under a lot of pressure, after a long time. Meanwhile, I don't want to wake up one morning and read in the paper about another wolf in a synagogue, or let loose on a playground filled with black children."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You think you can make him give you the names of the people he's given wolves to?"

"I'm going to try."

"But how?"

"Sweet reason," Garth said with a smile as he gently pulled away from his wife's grasp, turned, and kissed her before heading for the door.

"Garth, *you're* the lone wolf around here!" she called after him. "You and your brother are just the same. And when the two of you work together, what you have is a two-headed lone wolf."

"He'll love that description."

"You're not going to take a gun?"

Garth paused in the doorway, turned back. "I'm not planning on killing anyone—and if I was, I wouldn't be doing it in our home town. My guess is that the publicity wouldn't do anything for our privacy, and I don't think it's the kind of publicity your record company or music publisher would much appreciate."

"Garth—?!"

"I'll be home before dinner."

"Where does this Floyd Kunkel live?"

"Way too close," Garth replied, and in less than ten minutes was pulling onto the rutted dirt access road threading along the side of the abandoned traprock quarry at the edge of Cairn. He drove as far as he could go on the weed-choked road, then got out and with the camera case slung over his shoulder, clambered up the rockfall at the base of the escarpment where great mechanical behemoths had once sheared huge slices of stone that would eventually be crushed and used for the building of roads in New York City. He managed to climb a few yards up the wall itself to a ledge, where he sat, legs dangling over the edge, and looked down onto Floyd Kunkel's property. Through the zoom lens he could see that the spacious grounds included a shooting range, as well as a military-style obstacle course where perhaps a half-dozen men in tan uniforms were working out. At the southern end of the property was what appeared to be a kennel, with more than a dozen wooden shelters. Staked outside each shelter was a dark gray animal. Surrounding the entire complex were double chain-link fences, and the inside fence appeared to be electrified.

Garth shot two rolls of film, concentrating on the animal pens, then climbed down. He put the camera and rolls of film in the trunk of his car, then drove around to the front of Floyd Kunkel's mansion,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

parked at the top of the circular driveway. There were a number of cars in a parking area off to the side, and one enclosed van with Alaska license plates. He activated the tape recorder strapped to his waist, then went up to the front door of the Victorian mansion and knocked.

The man who came to the door was no more than five foot three or four. He had a wispy brown moustache that only served to highlight his sallow complexion, and wore a bushy, absurd-looking toupee that came halfway down over his forehead. His dark eyes were like the button eyes of a doll, without light, the eyes of a man in whom things had died, dreams and ambitions and a sense of self-worth, and then, like a crippled phoenix, had been resurrected as murderous hatred.

"Floyd Kunkel?"

"Maybe," the man replied nervously. "What do you want?"

"My name's Garth Frederickson. I'm a neighbor, and I'm here to try to do you a favor."

"Go away," Kunkel said, starting to close the door. "Whatever it is you're selling, I don't want any."

"It's about those hybrid wolves you've got in your backyard," Garth said, planting a large, strong hand on the door and pushing it back open. "The favor I'm doing is inviting you to come down to the police station to tell the names of the people you've given those hybrid wolves to. That won't stop the lawsuits that are going to cost you this house and everything else you own, but that kind of cooperation just might keep you out of prison."

Floyd Kunkel's pinched mouth opened and closed, and his button eyes opened wide. "Wh—? I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Yes you do. You've been training those animals to attack blacks and Jews, and then giving them away to your punk skinheads like membership cards, or merit badges. One of your boys decided to test his out to see if it would really do what you said it would. It did. It makes you a kind of accessory to murder. In the interest of saving time, why don't you just give me the names? How many wolves have you given away?"

The door abruptly swung all the way open, and Garth found himself looking at his own death. He had come to this place filled with contempt for spiritually crippled men he considered weaklings and cowards, but Franz Heitman was neither weak nor a coward. And the ex-Stasi agent had every reason in the world to want to kill him.

" 'Otto,' I presume?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The man with the very pale blue eyes and close-cropped blond hair stepped back, but kept the gun in his hand pointed directly at Garth's forehead. "Do come in, Frederickson."

"Fancy meeting you here, Franz. Interpol's looking very hard for you, you know, just like the citizens of your former country. There are a lot of people who'd dearly love to get their hands on you."

"You don't say? I guess I'd better stay in the United States for a while longer."

Kunkel, a bewildered expression on his face, looked at the German. "Otto? Why does this man call you Franz? How does he know you?"

"Leave us!" Franz Heitman snapped.

Garth turned to the slight man with the bushy toupee. "You know who you have working for you—or think you have working for you?" he asked just before the white-eyed man brought the barrel of the gun up against the side of his head. When he regained consciousness he found himself tied to a straight-backed chair in what appeared to be a small den or office. He was very much surprised to find he was still alive.

"So what's up, Frederickson?"

"You tell me, Franz. What's a professional murderer and torturer like yourself doing hanging around with a bunch of wimpy, wannabe Nazis? They're all amateurs; you're the real McCoy. What the hell are you up to?"

The white-eyed man sitting across from him behind a desk leaned back in his swivel chair, pushed aside the tape recorder he had removed from Garth's waist, then folded his hands behind his neck. "I owe you and your smartass little brother, Frederickson. The two of you put five bullets in me."

"Yeah, Franz, but you know how hard it is to kill a snake. You're actually looking quite fit, I'm sorry to say."

"Speaking of your smartass little brother, where is he? It's funny, isn't it, how I have trouble picturing one of you without the other? Wherever there's one Frederickson, the other usually can't be far behind."

The reason he was still alive, Garth thought. The German wanted to know who might be covering him, and who else might know about the wolves. He knew that Franz Heitman was unlikely to believe anything he said, so he decided he might as well tell the truth. "He's in Europe."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You don't say. Who are you working for? Who hired you to look into this wolf business?"

"Nobody."

"Nobody? Then why are you here?"

"I found one of the animals you carved up drowning in the river. What had been done to it pissed me off, so I decided to try to find out who was behind it. One thing led to another."

The German grunted. "You know, I think you may just be telling the truth. You told that fool Kunkel you were a neighbor. You live here in Cairn?"

Garth felt his heart begin to beat faster, and he struggled to keep his face impassive. "No. Who are you really working for?"

The other man laughed. "The usual suspects, of course."

"Abu Nidal's people? Saddam? Castro?"

Heitman smiled thinly. "Why go to the trouble of trying to smuggle bands of foreign-speaking terrorists into the United States when you have whole groups of American terrorists here all ready and willing, with just the slightest nudge in the right direction, to do all your work for you? It's true that your Klansmen and Nazis aren't too bright, but I've found that to work to my various employers' distinct advantage."

"We don't have the Europeans' centuries of practice at hating and murdering our own people. You let the wolf loose in that synagogue, didn't you?"

"A test of my training methods, with a most satisfactory result. Now it's time for a Day of the Wolf. The people who have the wolves are simply waiting eagerly for me to give the word. Of course, I must pick a suitable occasion—perhaps Rosh Hashana, or Yom Kippur, when there are lots of Jews wearing prayer shawls on the streets. At the same time, a number of the wolves will be let loose in black neighborhoods. I believe it will make quite a splash, in a manner of speaking."

"For what reason, Heitman?"

"You think Kunkel and his skinheads need a reason? They just want to kill blacks and Jews, and they think that using the wolves is a way for them to get away with it."

"You sold them the idea, of course."

"Of course."

"What's *your* reason? What's the point? You're a professional killer, not a goofy ideologue."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The other man shrugged. "Striking terror into the hearts of your enemies is always its own reason. You know the theory. That's my job. My employers consider the United States their enemy; terrorism is not only their weapon of choice, but their only weapon. There will be other operations like the Day of the Wolf. As you know, I'm rather clever at manipulating fools like Kunkel and his skinheads, and putting things like this together. The United States is a very big country, and I plan to keep busy here for some time."

"How many wolves are out there, Franz?"

"Enough," Heitman said, glancing at his watch and rising. "I'll leave you to your own devices for now, while we wait to see who may show up looking for you. I really do hope it will be your smartass little brother."

Left to his own devices, Garth practiced one other thing his brother had taught him, *muzukashi jotai kara deru,* which could be roughly translated as "extricating oneself from knotty situations," and which was a Japanese technique of muscle tensing and relaxation. What Garth had dismissed as a joke, or at most a parlor trick, his brother had used to save their lives inside a Swiss castle, and only then had Garth insisted that his brother teach him. What would have taken his brother ten minutes took him an hour, but at last he was free.

What he wanted was a telephone, but if there had been one in the office it had been removed. However, rifling through the desk drawers, he found a spiral notebook. Inside the notebook was written the name and address of a hybrid wolf farm in Alaska. There was also a list of men's names, addresses, and telephone numbers. The addresses were scattered all over the southern half of New York State, with close to a third in New York City. Twenty-five names, including that of a man in Kingston, had dark checks beside them. He ripped the pages with the names out of the notebook, folded them and put them in his wallet, then headed for the door, which opened out into a much larger study at what appeared to be the rear of the mansion.

He was halfway across the room when Franz Heitman entered. The German cursed and clawed for the gun in his shoulder holster, but by then Garth was running the rest of the way across the room, diving for a window. He put his forearms across his face and dived headfirst through the glass as a gun exploded behind him. He hit the ground on his left shoulder, rolled, and was up and sprinting across the well-manicured lawn toward a wooded area running

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

along the base of the abandoned quarry. As he ran he thought of Mary, wondered what she was thinking and doing. He had said he would be home before dinner, and so by now she would be worried, perhaps already have called the police. He had told her where he was going, but that did not mean the police, without a proper search warrant, would be able to find him. Heitman would certainly have moved his car out of sight, and Kunkel would simply deny he had ever been there. There would be nothing Jeff could do.

His greatest fear, the anxiety that had gnawed at his heart throughout the long night, was now realized as he approached the house and saw Mary's station wagon parked at the back of the mansion, where it had been placed in plain view to tell him that Franz Heitman had his wife. He threw his gun off to one side and entered the house through the back door into the kitchen, where he found Floyd Kunkel's corpse on the floor, a single bullet hole in his forehead.

"I'm here, Heitman."

"Right this way, Frederickson," Heitman's voice called. "Straight ahead."

Garth walked down a corridor with walls decorated with garish Nazi posters, into the spacious living room of the mansion. Mary was sitting very straight in a chair that had been placed in the middle of the room a few feet away from where the German sat on a couch, legs crossed, an automatic pistol resting in his lap. The wolf, lying on its stomach at Mary's feet, raised its head and began to wag its tail as Garth walked in.

"I knew those idiots wouldn't get you, Frederickson," the German continued, glancing at his watch. "In fact, you're here just about the time I thought you would be."

Garth looked at his wife. "Are you all right?"

Mary nodded. "You?"

"Yes."

"By the way," Heitman said with a thin smile, "the police did come around looking for you. Kunkel told them he didn't know what they were talking about. What were they to do? When your smartass little brother didn't show up like I expected him to, I decided that you must have been telling the truth when you said he was in Europe. I remembered you also telling Kunkel that you were a neighbor, so I went into town and made some inquiries—told people I was a long-lost friend of yours who'd misplaced your address and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

phone number. Everybody knows you; people were very helpful in giving me directions to your home. Incidentally, you and your lovely wife have done some nice work with that wolf. It's downright docile. I think I'm going to keep it for myself."

"He came to the house," Mary said in a small voice. "He said you needed my help right away, and that I should follow him and bring the wolf. I didn't know what else to do but what he asked."

Garth nodded, looked back into the cold, blue-white eyes of the ex-Stasi agent. "I saw the mess you left out in the kitchen. You must be getting ready to move on."

"Indeed. You've managed to make things uncomfortable for me here. But first I want to make some phone calls, and you have the numbers of the people I want to call. I'm thinking that today would make as good a Day of the Wolf as any. You have the list of names and phone numbers?"

"If you were certain I had the list with me, I wouldn't be alive right now."

"The thought did cross my mind that you might stash the list away someplace after you saw your wife's car, just to annoy me. Did you? You won't annoy me for long. I'd hate to put a bullet in your wife's kneecap to prompt an honest answer, so why don't you just tell me where to find the list?"

"If I do, will you let Mary go?"

"Give me a break, Frederickson. You want me to insult you by lying to you? Interpol and various other police forces I can handle, but I don't need your smartass little brother dedicating the rest of his life to hunting me down. I can't leave any witnesses. I will promise that neither of you will suffer."

"Under the circumstances, that seems fair enough," Garth said. He removed his wallet from his pocket, took out the folded pages, flipped them in the direction of the German. As the man reached out to catch them, Garth took the prayer shawl out of his jacket pocket and tossed it at the man's head. "You might as well take this, too."

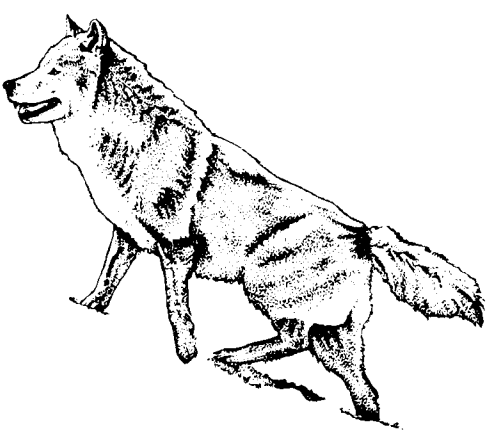
In the instant before the billowing prayer shawl settled down over his head, the German's pale eyes went wide with shock and horror. He grabbed for the gun in his lap with one hand, while with the other he frantically clawed at the fringed black and white cloth, but by then the wolf, which had sprung to its feet at first sight of the *tsallis,* was at him. Heitman screamed as he and the wolf toppled over backwards. Garth quickly walked around the overturned sofa,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gripped the wolf's collar, pulled him away from the German's head. The man had managed to protect his throat and was still alive, but his face was gone. Franz Heitman writhed on the floor, screaming, legs thrashing, his hands spasmodically reaching for, but never quite touching, his shredded flesh. Garth pulled the animal back around the sofa, brought it over to Mary, who gripped its collar while wrapping her free arm around its neck.

"Our wolf is going to need a lot of love and counter-training if he's going to unlearn the nasty habits he's been taught, which is essential if he's going to be allowed to live," Garth said as he walked across the room and picked up a phone to call the police and an ambulance. "Considering the fact that he's played a large part in saving a lot of people's lives, including our own, maybe we should keep him. I could look into getting a special permit, and we could build an appropriate enclosure. Would you like that?"

Mary, her eyes brimming with tears, simply nodded.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEXT ISSUE...

12 stories—including

Freeze Everybody by DAVID WILLIAMS

Where's Stacey? by LIZA CODY

Willie's Last Trip by DONALD OLSON

Dead Men by DAVID ELY

JANET HUTCHINGS ..... *Editor*
TARA ANN CUDDIHY ..... *Assistant Editor*
JEAN TRAINA ..... *Design Director*
TERRI CZECZKO ..... *Art Director*
ANTHONY BARI ..... *Junior Designer*
MARILYN ROBERTS ..... *Senior Production Manager*
CAROLE DIXON ..... *Production Manager*
CYNTHIA MANSON ..... *Director of Marketing and Subsidiary Rights*
CONSTANCE SCARBOROUGH ..... *Contracts Manager*
BARBARA PARROTT ... *Director of Newsstand Circulation*
BRUCE SCHWARTZ ..... *Director of Circulation Subscription Sales*
DENNIS JONES ..... *Operations Manager Subscription Sales*
LESLIE GUARNIERI .... *Renewal & Billing Manager Subscription Sales*
FRED SABLOFF ..... *Advertising Director*
JUDY DORMAN ..... *Assistant Advertising/ Sales Manager*

ADVERTISING OFFICES

NEW YORK
(212) 782-8562

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVE
Dresner Direct, Inc., N.Y., N.Y. (212) 889-1078

CHRISTOPH HAAS-HEYE
President and Publisher
Dell Magazines

JACK HOEFT
President and CEO
Bantam Doubleday Dell

ELLERY QUEEN
Editor-in-Chief
(1941–1982)

ELEANOR SULLIVAN
Editor-in-Chief
(1982–1991)

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Vol. 102, No. 1, Whole No. 615, July 1993. Published every 28 days which includes special issues in March and October by Dell Magazines, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines, at $2.25 a copy in the U.S.A., $2.95 in Canada. 1 year subscription $31.97 in U.S.A. and possessions, $37.50 elsewhere, payable in advance and in U.S. funds (GST included in Canada). Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Call 800-333-3053 with questions about your subscription. Editorial and Executive Offices, 1540 Broadway, N.Y., N.Y. 10036. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to Ellery Queen, P.O. Box 7052, Red Oak, Iowa 51591. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third-class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario.

© 1993 Dell Magazines, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines, all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE® is the registered trademark of Ellery Queen. Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.

POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 5127, Harlan, IA 51593-5127. In Canada return to 3255 Wyandotte Street East, Windsor, Ontario N8Y 1E9. ISSN: 1054-8122. Dell GST: R123054108. For back issues, send $3.50 to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462. Printed in U.S.A.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE

EQ JULY '93

QUEEN/HITCHCOCK combination CLASSIFIED AD rate is $4.80 per word—payable in advance ($72.00 minimum). Capitalized words 60¢ per word additional. To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to Judy Dorman, DELL MAGAZINES, 1540 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10036.

ADDITONAL INCOME

GET PAID FOR READING BOOKS! $100 per book. Send name, address to: Calco Publishing (Dept. C-337), 500 South Broad, Meriden, CT 06450.

AUTHORS' SERVICES

HOW TO PUBLISH YOUR BOOK

Join our successful authors in a complete and reliable publishing program: publicity, advertising, handsome books. Speedy, efficient service. Send for FREE manuscript report & copy of **Publish Your Book.**

CARLTON PRESS Dept **SMQ**
11 West 32 St., New York, 10001

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK NOW! Your book can be published and promoted by the leading subsidy book publisher. Send for free booklet HP-5. Vantage Press, 516 W. 34th St., New York, NY 10001.

Agent interested in unpublished manuscripts, fiction. Query/Sase, Writer's Literary Service, Box 575, Exton, PA 19341.

AUTHOR'S SERVICES —Cont'd

COMPLETE AUTHOR SERVICE - For details send Sase to J. Sandars, 940 Royal St., #252, New Orleans, LA 70116.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperback, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

ANNOTATED lists of new mysteries. Also used mystery catalog. Rue Morgue, 946 Pearl, Boulder, CO 80302. Order any in-print mystery: 1-800-356-5586.

MYSTERY ADDICTS! Free catalogue! New and Recycled Detective Fiction. Grave Matters, Box 32192-C, Cincinnati, OH 45232, 513-242-7527.

FREE Catalogue of used and collectable detective fiction. Dunn and Powell Books, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, Maine 04609.

FREE used mysteries catalog. No Tie Required, Box 9592, Cedar Rapids, IA 52409. 319-363-7708.

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Continued

EQ JULY '93

BOOK & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

FREE Catalog. Used hardbound and paperback mystery fiction. Books West, Box 417760, Sacramento, CA 95841.

MANUSCRIPTS WANTED, all types. Company with 70-year tradition. "Author's Guide to Subsidy Publishing." 1-800-695-9599.

Past issues of EQMM and AHMM magazines available. Free Catalog. APB Magazines, PO Box 214997, Sacramento, CA 95821.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

WE'LL PAY YOU TO TYPE NAMES AND ADDRESSES FROM HOME. $500.00 PER 1000. Call 1-900-896-1666 ($1.49 min/18 yrs. +) or Write: PASSE-XAH793, 161 S. Lincolnway, N. Aurora, IL 60542.

CATALOGS AND DIRECTORIES

CRYSTAL Balls, Jewelry, send for free catalog, Anderson's 3304 Yorba Linda Blvd., #392, Fullerton, CA 92631.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets. Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, New Bern, NC 28563.

FOR SALE MISCELLANEOUS

FREE STORY! PUZZLE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, fiction quarterly. SASE for story or $20.00 for 1/yr subscription. 2903-EQ Fernan Terrace, CDA, ID 83814-5853.

INVENTORS

RECEIVE your FREE Information Kit about PATENTING and MARKETING New product ideas. The Concept Network. Professional and Inexpensive services. 1-800-835-2246. Ext. 197. Call now!

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNTIES

GUARANTEED INCOME! Innovative marketing concept. For complete information send $5.00 and Sase to: Anderson Marketing, PO Box 671, Brick, NJ 08723.

MYSTERIES

FREE CATALOGS, Mystery, Hardcover, Vintage Paperbacks. Ed McDonald's Mostly Mystery, 111 Boston Avenue, Stratford, CT 06497.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people, 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

BEAUTIFUL BRITISH LADIES & ELIGIBLE BRITISH GENTLEMEN seek friendship, romance & marriage with American ladies & gentlemen! ALL ages! Free details: ENGLISH ROSE INTRODUCTION AGENCY, (Dept. D/P), 2nd Floor, Mill Lane House, Mill Lane, Margate, Kent, ENGLAND. TEL: 01144-843-290735.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP, MARRIAGE. American-Mexican-Oriental. Free Photos. Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista CA 91912 (619) 425-1716.

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PERSONAL-Cont'd

GAY CONTACTS! WRITE MMM INC. PO Box P(A), Conway New Hampshire 03818.

FREE photos! Meet pretty Mexican ladies. World, Box 7358DD, Moreno Valley, CA 92552. Call 1-800-643-7309.

TRADITIONAL ORIENTAL WIVES! Presentations by American husband, Filipini wife. Since 1984. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948. (415) 897-2724.

COMPUTERIZED HANDWRITING ANALYSIS. Mail 100 words and signature. $25 check or money order. Positech Ltd., Box 16, Site 11, R.R. 4, Stony Plain AB, Canada, T0E 2G0.

TAPES & CASSETTES & CDs

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, PA 17349.

LET'S WRITE FICTION. Ralph McInerny, creator of Father Dowling, on audio tape, 8 lessons, booklet, album, $19.95 + $2 p&h. Visa/Mastercard. Box 494, Notre Dame, In 46556 or 1-800-852-9962.

FINALLY! Educational horse videos that tell all about horses. Includes: Breeds, Colors, Buying, Care, Medical Needs and much more. VHS only $64.95 per set. Item, EA1105, 1-800-525-3166. Char, Mid-Video, P.O. Box 1615, Buford, GA 30518.

For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:
Combo #1, Combo #2, Combo #3

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.
For further information write to Judy Dorman
Dell Magazines, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036.

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY WAREHOUSE SALE!

Join us in our first anthology warehouse sale with great savings! For only $12.95 (includes postage and handling), you will receive five classic *Ellery Queen* anthologies. Our warehouse is packed with anthologies that will provide you with hours of great reading. Act quickly...this sale is for a limited time.

Please send your name and address with your check or money order for $12.95 to:

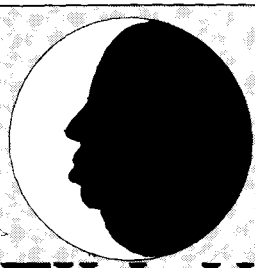
Ellery Queen
P.O. Box 40
Vernon, NJ 07462

MXNQ-9

While we cannot accommodate requests for specific anthologies, we guarantee that you will be delighted with your surprise assortment.

Available only in the US and Canada. Canadian orders please add $4.00 (US funds only). Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



FULFILL YOUR NIGHTMARES

Enjoy chilling tales of mystery and suspense. Sometimes humorous, sometimes nightmarish. But always an intriguing puzzle.

AND SAVE 25%

To receive 18 issues for only $28.97 (you save 25%) or 12 issues for $19.97, subscribe today!.

CALL TOLL FREE 1-800-333-3311

or

Mail to: Hitchcock, P.O. Box 7055, Red Oak, IA 51591

MXNC-0

Outside U.S. & Poss., 18 issues for $39.97, 12 issues for $27.97. All foreign orders must be paid in U.S. currency. Canadian orders include GST.

Please allow four to six weeks for delivery of your first issue. We publish two double issues, in June and Mid-December. These count as two each towards your subscription.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAIL ORDER MALL

A true American folk tradition, quilt making was a favorite pastime in the 1800's when one quilt could take years to make and was passed on from one generation to another. In recent years, handmade quilts have soared in popularity.We offer the Double Wedding Ring, one of the most popular designs calling to mind the traditions surrounding marriage, home and family. Our quilt is offered in 3 sizes with matching shams and ready made 16 inch square pillow. Twin Quilt (68"×86") $99.98 (S450) #A2006. Full/Queen Quilt (86"×86") $159.98 (S450) #A2007. King Quilt (100"×90") $199.98 (S500) #A2008. Single Sham (20"×26") $29.98 (S350) #A2009. Pillow (16"×16") $19.98 (S350) #A2010.

TO ORDER: Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL** DEPT 073 EL, P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-722-9999.** NJ residents add 7% sales tax. We honor MasterCard, Visa, and American Express. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. **30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund.**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED